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THE LADY EGERIA



By J. B. HARWOOD

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OR,

BROUGHT TO LIGHT.



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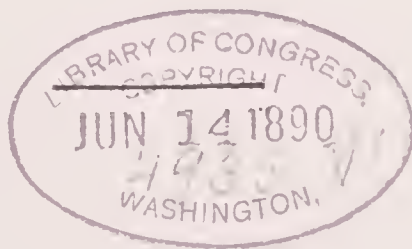
BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

A NOVEL.

BY

JOHN BERWICK HARWOOD,

AUTHOR OF "ONE FALSE, BOTH FAIR."



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THE LADY EGERIA

OR,

BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE RAJAH'S PALACE.

“THE Durbar is over, sahib. If my lord would wait, the prince would see him.”

And, as he said the words, the speaker, who was clad in a robe of white, and wore a jeweled badge in front of his muslin turban, as become the confidential servant of a Rajah, bent his supple back, and smiled a deferential welcome to the European visitor whom he knew to have found unusual favor with his wayward master.

“Right, Motee—I’ll wait,” cheerfully responded the young officer, as his undress uniform showed him to be, and then retreated a pace or two, and leaned his graceful strength against one of the tall marble columns of the outer hall, as with half-shut eyes he watched the Rajah’s counselors file past. These were of all degrees, from the portly Hindoo banker, or the shrewd Parsee merchant, to the martial Mahometan noble, proud of his Turkish blood, and twisting his wiry moustache as he strode by to where his horse and his running footmen awaited him among the tamarind trees without.

A handsome young fellow enough, with his well-knit form and regular features, and the crisp, curling hair of darkest brown that peeped from beneath the white helmet that he wore as a protection against the burning rays of an Indian sun.

But the eyes were more remarkable than the shapely mouth, with its pleasant smile, or the broad, low brow. Fine hazel eyes they were, gentle, and even pensive, in their ordinary expression, but which at rare moments could flash like those of an actual falcon, and with much the same expression as that of the bird of prey about to dart upon its destined quarry.

It was seldom, however, that those eyes assumed that tell-tale glitter, whether of wrath or greed, for Lieutenant Richard Harrington was among the most popular officers of the cavalry regiment to which he belonged. Not quite so well liked, perhaps, as his elder brother, who was a captain in the same corps, and who had won the good-will of all around him, but still standing well with every one, from the grey-haired colonel to the very privates.

The badge of crape that he wore around his arm had been very recently assumed. It was indeed but a few days since the news of their father's death had reached the two brothers. That news had been startling indeed. Sir George Harrington, a hale man, who had seemed likely to live for many years, had perished in a railway accident, and on Captain Lionel Harrington, as eldest son and heir, the title and estates had now suddenly devolved.

The palace, at the door of which the young officer now awaited his audience with the prince, was vast and spacious, but there was something stern and gloomy about its aspect, standing, as it did, in the depths of an Indian forest, with its giant trees and dense undergrowth of bushes and creeping plants.

It stood about equally remote from the little town which was the Rajah's capital and from the cantonments of the British military force, and with its frowning battlements and numerous towers had the air rather of a fortress than of a mere mansion. As a fortress, indeed, it had been originally planned, and had, before now, repulsed a siege by European troops, for the grandfather of Amarat Rao, the present Rajah, had been a thorn in the side of the Honorable East India Company when first the pacification of that turbulent part of the country was undertaken in real earnest. All that was over long since.

The reigning family had been sufficiently prudent or lucky to make their peace with the powers that be, and had rendered good service during the Mutiny, and had thus

earned a sort of hereditary claim to the Order of the Star of India, as well as to the designation of Victorious Child, bestowed by the Viceregal Government as a reward for help rendered in troublous times.

And yet Amarat Rao, K.S.I., and Rajah of Futtehpore, was not fully trusted by the supreme authorities as a vassal of his rank should be.

It was a strong brigade that lay encamped close to his tiny capital, and a well-chosen official who acted as Resident at his petty court. The prince was known to have all the usual vices of an Oriental despot—indolence excepted—and there were whispers of dark intrigues carried on by the help of obscure agents, and of a confederacy of discontented chiefs ready, should opportunity but serve, to make use of the prestige that still clung to Amarat Rao's ancient lineage, and which had enabled his forefathers to defy the Mogul Emperors when at the zenith of their power.

Nothing was proved, however ; and to all appearance Rajah and Resident were on the most amicable terms, while but a month before the officers of the English garrison had been royally entertained at the palace—no very rare event, for Amarat Rao, with all his faults, was hospitably inclined, and would occasionally appear to take pleasure in the society of educated Europeans.

To Richard Harrington the Rajah was reputed to have taken a remarkable fancy, and the young man had been more often at the palace, and more frequently invited to accompany the prince on his hunting expeditions, than any one of his brother officers.

Perhaps the strange fluency with which he spoke Hindustani—for he was one of those born linguists to whom the acquisition of a foreign language appears an instinctive accomplishment—may have recommended him to the Rajah's favor ; but, at any rate, the fact was so ; and this was the second visit he had paid to the palace during the few days that had elapsed since his becoming cognizant of Sir George's death.

Motee, the confidential servant, who had slipped away, now came back with catlike tread.

"Our lord, the prince, protector of the poor, awaits you, sahib !" he said, with a fresh salaam ; and under his guidance Richard Harrington threaded his way through

shadowy halls and pillared galleries, and across narrow belts of garden, where roses bloomed and sparkling fountains tossed on high their spray, shining in the sun like diamond dust. He passed sundry groups of dusky servants, who greeted him with respect, and a knot of the armed troopers of the Rajah's bodyguard, whose weapons clattered as they stepped back to let him pass through their ranks; but in general hall and cloister were empty, and showed signs as of decay and neglect. Those arabesques gorgeous with gold, those colored marbles from Italy, those costly fountains, even the choice flowers brought from Europe to be acclimatized in India, told of by-gone splendor and prodigal expenditure such as successful or hard-handed oppression could alone provide for.

The young officer found the Rajah, as he had expected, not in the great audience chamber in which the formal Durbar had just been held, but in a smaller room, pillared with Carrara marble, and decorated in the Moorish style, where the prince, when alone, usually sat.

"I am glad to see you, Ric Sahib," said Amarat Rao, affably, as he held out his languid, jeweled fingers for Lieutenant Harrington to touch with his own, and signed to the young officer to seat himself among the silken cushions of the raised platform, draped with rich stuff, which constituted the dais or divan, and above which was a canopy of peacocks' plumes and cloth of gold. The prince was, like most high-caste natives, very different in aspect from the swarthy soldiers and attendants who swarmed beneath his palace roof. In fact, with his pale, dark face and clear-cut features, he might easily have been mistaken for a Spaniard or a Sicilian but for the snow-white robes he wore and for his small turban, in front of which was the coveted jika or aigrette of herons' plumes mingled with diamonds, the well-known badge of Eastern royalty. A Delhi scarf of red, embroidered in silk and gold, was wound around his waist, and in it was a short dagger, the haft of which was encrusted with very large rubies, while the triple necklace that he wore was composed of great pearls, the value of which, heirlooms as they were, it would have been hard to estimate. Motee, so soon as the visitor was seated, made haste to offer betel nut and sweetmeats on a tiny golden tray, and so soon as the European, now well versed in the lessons of Oriental

politeness, had touched these successively with the tips of his fingers, salaamed and retired.

"You have, prince, a jewel of a servant in Motee, unless I mistake," remarked the young officer, smiling, when they were left alone.

"A pearl of a servant, as his name implies," answered the Rajah, in English, which he spoke correctly enough, but slowly and with effort, and then, in his own tongue, continued: "The dog is really grateful, I believe, because I saved him from a dog's death. You look surprised, my young friend, but such things are. Four years ago, you must know, Motee was a Thug, and one of the most skillful stranglers, I believe, in a very dangerous gang, six of whom we hanged, including their captain and lieutenant, Ali Khan and Lall Singh by name, for the band was pretty equally divided between the two religions. Motee there had the luck to be able to write Persian poetry and the wit to address me in verse from his prison, and I had the whim or the weakness to save his rascally neck from the cord; though, after all, the poor fellow has good qualities, and would go through fire and water at my bidding, I am sure. Yes, he makes me a good servant. But you did not come here to-day, Ric Sahib, to talk merely of the merits of Motee," added the prince, opening his sleepy, dark eyes, which seemed to dilate like those of a tiger awakening from repose, and throwing a searching glance at Richard Harrington.

"Indeed, no," replied the young man, earnestly, but looking anxiously around, as though to be certain that no eavesdropper was at hand; "I wish to pursue, prince, with your Highness' permission, the conversation which—you may remember—"

"I remember!" said the Rajah, with emphasis, as the other hesitated; "you did but drop a hint, Ric Sahib, the other day, when you told me of your wealthy father's death; but a hint is enough for me, and India is—India; though some of your philanthropists are pleased to view us and our country through a rose-colored haze, as I know. Shali we walk up and down, Ric, and talk the matter over? I am weary of sitting still to hearken to the platitudes of yonder solemn asses in Durbar. But you, boy, are a man of action, one after my own heart."

The Rajah, ever restless, rose as he spoke, and he and

Lieutenant Harrington, for the space of some half hour, paced together to and fro among the marble pillars of the long and dimly-lighted hall, conversing alternately in Hindustani and in English, but in tones studiously low, and with evident caution. During the last part of the interview the prince, who had passed his arm round Richard Harrington's neck, spoke only in a whisper—

“Enough; we understand each other. It shall be done!” said the Rajah at length, in louder and more decisive accents, but smiling as he spoke. He clapped his hands, and Motee appeared as promptly as a spirit summoned by a wizard; and, under his guidance, again did the European visitor traverse the outer courts of the huge palace, until at last he reached the free air, mounted his horse, and road back to the camp.

CHAPTER II.

THE AMBUSH.

“TERRIBLE news to-day—thirty-seven fresh cases, so the Havildar reported to my husband, in our regiment alone, since last night. And in the Bazaar yonder, the poor wretches are dying like flies. It is worse, I really think, than the plague could be.”

“All this makes me nervous and unhappy—more for Frank's sake than mine,” said another and a younger lady, as she adjusted the folds of her riding habit of grey linen, and patted the glossy neck of her Arab horse.

“I wish, I do wish, that the Government would take fright too, and order us off to the hills, before worse comes of it.”

And yet, from the appearance of the cantonments, it would have been difficult to guess that a fearful epidemic of cholera was raging in the district; that the native town, or so-called Bazaar, was shunned as the direst centre of the fell disease; that the military hospitals were full of sick and dying; and that the disorder had already mown down its hundreds.

The camp looked picturesque and cheerful, as usual, with its ranges of huts and clusters of white tents, its

fluttering flags, and on its outskirts the customary line of thick-roofed villas or bungalows, each standing in its compound, or well-fenced garden and yard, and all presenting an aspect of comfort and security. Troops, native and European, were being drilled or exercised on the parade grounds ; patrols rode clanking past ; water carriers and vendors of fuel or vegetables went straggling by, bending under their loads ; while carriages and equestrians were frequently to be seen, starting for the invigorating ride or drive, for which the early morning in India, alone, is suited.

Day had not long dawned, and the hot sun had not the power that, later on, its glowing rays would possess, while a pleasant breeze played among the broad-leaved shrubs of the gardens, and caused the canvas of the tents to heave and flap as each welcome gust went by.

“Who are those? They seem a perfect cavalcade,” said a third member of the mounted party, who were preparing to set off for the traditional gallop at dawn—a young subaltern this, whose sojourn in India had begun but a fortnight since, and who was, naturally, unused to the ways of the country.

“Nothing very wonderful!” answered, smiling, the more experienced paymaster, who made the fourth member of the group. “Only two officers of the Lancers, with their orderlies and servants and baggage animals, setting out on detachment duty towards Dhoondi Tope, I suspect, where some European cavalry and horse artillery are stationed. Ah! I see who they are—those two young Harringtons—Sir Lionel, as I suppose we ought to call the captain now, and his brother Richard.”

“The inseparables!” said the younger of the two married ladies, with a silvery laugh. “Frank gives them the nickname of Damon and Pythias—not inappropriate either, since you seldom see one without the other.”

And indeed the affectionate regard of the brothers for one another had become proverbial in the cantonments of Futtehpore, and occasioned some speculation among their friends as to what, in their altered circumstances, would become of them.

There had never been a doubt as to what the young baronet, with his large fortune and high hereditary position in his native county, would do. Of course, he would give

up soldiering and return home, to represent the shire in Parliament, as his father and grandfather had done, and to undertake the duties of a landed proprietor.

Richard, the younger, had, indeed, declared his own intention to remain in the East and pursue his military career ; but there were many who said, laughingly, that Sir Lionel could never do without him, and that the two would be domiciled at Greystone Abbey before many months were out.

Meanwhile, as had been conjectured, the two young officers who had been the subjects of conversation, rode on across the camp, and leaving the hard road, struck into the weed-grown jungle track which led towards the remote and secluded station of Dhoondi Tope. They were not alone, since a paymaster, as well as two native clerks in Government employ, accompanied them on horseback ; and there were also a train of bullocks, laden with stores of various kinds, and one or two carts containing bags of silver coin for regimental pay, as well as tent lascars, coolies, and domestic servants, and all the followers without whom, in India, no march can be undertaken, and which swelled the number of the party to an imposing sum total.

The expedition, it was reckoned, would take, in all, from two to three days, and it was necessary to be provided with much that, in Europe, the traveler is exempt from taking with him.

Escort, strictly speaking, there was none. The neighborhood was a quiet one, and not a professional Thug or Dacoit had for years past infested it ; so that it had not been deemed worth while to put the treasure under the protection of a regular guard.

As the foremost riders reached the edge of the jungle, both the brothers, as if moved by a common impulse, reined up their steeds and looked back. There, through a faint haze of dust, was discernible the camp they had left, the tents and flags, the houses and gardens, the infantry at drill, the long line of troopers, two and two, taking their horses to water at the tank, and the flutter of plumed hats and lined riding habits among the baobab trees and hedges of milkthorn.

To the left stretched a yellow plain, varied by orchards and villages nestling in hollows, where a rivulet of water trickled from the higher levels of the forest, and ran, fringed

by feathery bamboos, past hamlets and rice fields. Dimly seen to the right were the domes and minarets and densely-crowded buildings of the Bazaar, where, as the gazers well knew, the scythe of Death was so busy.

There were two ill-kept roads which entered the forest just at that spot—that which led towards the distant fort of Dhoondi Tope, for which, with the money and stores, the wayfarers were bound ; and another, narrower but less weed-grown, that led towards the Rajah's palace, not a trace of which, however, could be distinguished, so dense was the screen of ancient trees.

“There's the road to your friend's house, Dick!” was the half-careless remark of the elder brother, as he smilingly pointed with his hand towards where he knew the unseen mass of halls and towers to lie. “I have no right to quarrel with his Highness' taste, but I shouldn't like to live where he does, myself. A month in that dreary place would be enough to turn one's brain.”

“Wouldn't suit me either ; but live and let live,” tranquilly responded Richard Harrington ; and then added, as the paymaster rode up, “How say you, Macfarlane ? Lionel and I are of one mind, that it would not be worth living in so dismal a mansion as the palace, yonder, even to be the Rajah of a much bigger State than Futtehpore.”

“'Deed you may say so,” chimed in Mr. Macfarlane, whose sympathies with natives and their customs were not very much developed. “It's not their heathenish splendors that would tempt me to such a life of puffing at hookahs and chewing betel nut. One day in Lochaber is worth a month in India, gentlemen.”

And they rode on, and were soon lost to sight amidst the deepening glades of the forest, followed by the long train of baggage and attendants. It was remarkable to notice how strong was the resemblance between Sir Lionel Harrington and his brother, different as the two were in complexion, and even in expression. Richard, as has been mentioned, was dark, with crisp, brown curls and hazel eyes. Those of Captain Harrington were blue, and matched well with the golden hair and a skin delicately fair, although there was no lack of manliness in the young baronet's aspect. He was handsomer, stronger, and slightly taller than his brother, while in his face there was something frank and noble, something inexpressibly winning, which

won him the good-will of all who valued honor and courage and courtesies. There were those who said that Lionel Harrington's bearing had made them believe, for the first time, in tales of chivalry and of knights without reproach or fear.

The cavalcade wended slowly onward for some hours, in the midst of a luxuriant vegetation ; the rosy shrubs or bamboo brakes alternating with clumps of huge trees, from stem to stem and bough to bough of which hung, like flowery ropes, the matted creepers that play so important a part in sub-tropical forest growth. Nothing beyond the occasional sight of a deer, or the gleam of gorgeous plumage as a wild peacock rose screaming on the wing, broke the solemn stillness of the jungle ; but the heat of the day increased perceptibly as the sun climbed higher in the heavens, and the morning breeze grew faint and died away.

"What on earth can it be? Something shining—like steel—among the bushes ; and I thought I heard the neigh of a horse," suddenly exclaimed Sir Lionel, drawing bridle and grasping his revolver. "Richard !—Macfarlane ! Look out for mischief."

The warning was all too late, for in the next instant there were a flash of flame and a crackling report, as a dozen matchlocks were discharged from behind the brushwood, and forth from the ambush rushed a body of natives, horse and foot, brandishing their weapons and shouting savagely—

"Maro ! Maro ! Kill ! kill ! Down with the Feringhées !"

There were a few moments of inexpressible confusion, din and hurry. The sharp bang, bang of the revolvers with which the officers were armed might be heard amidst the furious cries of the assailants, the trampling of horses, the clash of swords, and the agonized shrieks of the miserable camp followers, who flung themselves in terror on the ground, or ran aimlessly to and fro, praying for mercy and quarter.

Of the issue of the encounter there could be no doubt from the first, for the assailants so far outnumbered the handful of combatants on the other side as to render the struggle a hopeless one.

Mr. Macfarlane, the paymaster, never was able to give a coherent account of what had really occurred. That he

had been unhorsed, bruised somewhat severely, and slightly grazed by a sword stroke, the weight of which had beaten down his guard, he well knew, as also the fact that it was considerably past tiffin time when, dusty and exhausted, he regained the cantonments to apprise those in authority of the audacious violence with which some evil doers unknown had overpowered the escort and, doubtless, made free with the treasure. But long ere this Richard Harrington, pale and wild-eyed, had ridden at full speed into the camp to communicate the tidings of the recent disaster, and to call for aid to be instantly sent. All he knew concerning the assault was that it had been as successful as it was unexpected. He was himself unharmed, but every chamber of his revolver had been discharged, and there was blood—the blood of others—sprinkled over his clothes and saddle that showed the narrowness of his escape. In the scuffle he had lost sight of his brother, to whose succor he implored that all who heard him would hasten without the loss of a moment.

Orders were given for a strong cavalry force to saddle and start at once, and there was no lack of eagerness on the part of the soldiers, angry for the attack on their officers, and thirsting for revenge. Before the rescuers were ready, the two orderlies, one of whom had lost his lance, and was bleeding, came galloping in to confirm Richard Harrington's story. They did not believe, they said, that one of the natives accompanying the convoy had been spared, and were ready to affirm that Paymaster Macfarlane, too, had been one of the victims of the massacre. They, too, were in ignorance of the fate of their captain, but one of them had a vague recollection of having, as he broke through the press of foes, caught sight of Sir Lionel, sword in hand, but surrounded by the enemy.

The relieving party got to horse as quickly as they could, and rode briskly off, raising a cloud of dust as they swept across the plain and plunged into the jungle road ; Richard Harrington, who was well mounted, spurring on in front, and urging them to hasten to his dearly-loved brother's assistance.

In the cantonments wonder and indignation knew no bounds. The neighborhood was considered as tranquil and safe ; officers on duty or on sporting expeditions, ladies and children were accustomed to go about the district with

a sense of security that would now be banished for many a day.

Some hours of painful expectancy went by. Sundry of the native servants, coolies and bullock drivers came straggling in, all scared and ghastly to look upon, and, for the most part, with recent wounds to show. Mr. Macfarlane, too, arrived, as much annoyed, apparently, at the loss of his saddle horse as at the untoward accident that had befallen the Government cash, or the probable doom of his two brother officers, of neither of whom had he caught a glimpse since the onslaught.

"Fifteen hundred rupees the brute cost me, for Arabs are dear in the market," he pithily remarked; "and a pony at two hundred would have been good enough, and too good, to be left in the clutches of yon black wretches."

At last the cavalry came clanking back, with gloomy looks and dejected air. They had found the scene of the late encounter tenanted only by the dead, since the corpses of eight or ten of the native servants and camp followers strewed the ground. The bullock carts were empty, and the treasure gone. Of Captain Sir Lionel Harrington no trace had proved discoverable. The trampled ground, the stains and pools of blood, told of a severe, if hopeless, struggle; but of the unfortunate young officer, or of his horse, nothing could be seen. The searchers, at Richard Harrington's entreaty, had tarried long at the fatal spot, shouting aloud, exploring every path through the jungle, peering into every thicket; but all in vain. They had come back baffled, and the young baronet's fate remained involved in mystery, though few augured that he could yet be numbered amongst the living.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHOLERA BED.

A GLOOM prevailed in the camp at Futtehpore, usually so cheerful. What the cholera, still virulent and on the increase, had failed to effect, was caused by the wanton attack of which, there could be no reasonable doubt, young Sir Lionel had been the most prominent of the vic-

tims. All were sorry and saddened, and that the more so since no inquiries could establish any certainty, however painful. The native police had undertaken a quest which led to no discovery. The treasure, as might have been expected, had been carried off, and so had some of the more portable of the stores, such as cartridges and clothing ; but of the plunderers nothing could be heard.

The marauders had vanished as entirely as if the earth had swallowed them up. And as with the robbers, so was it with the luckless Sir Lionel. In vain did Richard Harrington, who was inconsolable, and whose grief drew forth the sympathy of all who saw him, again and again, during the two days that succeeded the disaster, revisit the scene of the skirmish, accompanied by friends and servants, and even enlist the trained skill of swarthy Shikarees used to the tracking of wild beasts. Of wild beasts? Alas ! it was more than probable that the body of the ill-starred young officer might have been torn to pieces, long ago, by wolves or jackals, in some obscure thicket into which, sorely wounded, he had crawled to die.

Towards sunset on the second day, and when Richard Harrington, weary and dispirited, had returned to the cantonments after a renewal of the fruitless search, Motee, the Rajah's favorite attendant, came breathless to the young man's quarters to announce that his missing brother had been at last found, and to offer at once to guide him to the place where he lay.

"For the sahib captain ill—very, very ill—dead perhaps !" said the confidential servant, sadly, as he shook his head and drooped his eyes. "Poor people—low-caste men, as you call them, sir—who burn charcoal in the woods to sell in the town, they find the sahib lying among bushes, not able to speak. They carry him to their own hut, far away. He get worse—so ill—they frightened and come to palace and send word to the prince, and the Rajah order Motee to hurry to Ric Sahib, and lead him to the spot."

Motee, when questioned, both by Lieutenant Harrington and by two of the other officers who chanced to be with him at the arrival of this messenger of startling news, had not much more to tell. What little he knew, however, he recounted lucidly enough, in English, which, like many Hindoo servants of the better sort, he spoke with tolerable accuracy, since the other two subalterns who

were present were less conversant with native speech than was Richard Harrington.

The charcoal burners, he said, related that they had found the young officer stretched on the ground, in a lonely part of the jungle, helpless and speechless, and writhing in the pain of severe illness—cholera, no doubt. They had carried him slowly along the narrow path that led to their own solitary hut, and had laid him on some sort of bed, but were too ignorant to be able to do anything to alleviate his sufferings. Then he ceased to writhe and moan, and his wild hosts grew alarmed, fearing he might be dead, and dreading punishment should the body of an English officer be found hidden beneath their miserable roof, and so at last they decided to go off to their prince's palace with the news. It was not immediately that despised outcasts such as these could get a hearing from the Rajah's servitors.

"At last," said Motee, "some one listen—tell one of the indoor servants of our lord, and so the tidings come to my ears, and I go to my lord the Rajah, and he bid me order to be saddled a swift horse, and so I come here, as fast as the grooms can run, to say the sad thing ; but I fear too late !"

Ten minutes more, and Richard Harrington, accompanied by his two friends and by the surgeon of the regiment, as well as by a number of native attendants, some of whom bore blazing torches, needful amidst the shadows of the darkling forest, and others a light ambulance hand litter constructed of bamboo, set forth for that portion of the jungle which lay nearest to the cantonments, under the guidance of Motee.

There was much excitement prevailing throughout the lines, for the rumor that the lost was found had spread like wildfire, but none offered, for fear of intruding on the younger brother's grief, to accompany the searching party from motives of mere curiosity. The men contented themselves with crowding together to watch the straggling line of torches, until they vanished in the darkness of the falling night.

Slowly, too slowly for Richard Harrington's natural impatience, did the long procession thread its way along the sinuous paths, narrow, and crossed in places by wild vines and parasitic plants, often covered with blossoms of

strange shapes and colors, that grew in rich luxuriance, stretching from tree to tree.

The tall, coarse grass in many places rose breast high, and, with the frequent canebrakes, afforded just such lurking places as a tiger prefers. From tigers, however, nothing was to be feared. The torches, the sound of many feet, the crackling of dried twigs beneath the tread, and the hum of voices, would have sufficed to deter even a confirmed man-eater from showing his striped skin amidst the bushes. Now and then, with angry hiss, a startled snake would move, rustling off through the reeds and grass, and from afar, come the hateful cry of the ever-restless jackal, but otherwise the stillness of the woods was absolute. The endless rows of tall trees stretched away into darkness, fitfully irradiated here and there by specks of light, as fireflies uncounted danced and wheeled beneath their spreading boughs.

"There, sahib, is the hut," said Motee at last, pointing to a low-roofed hovel, built of the roughest materials, bamboos from the brake and mud from the swamp, and thatched with palm leaves.

With beating hearts, the four Europeans pushed open the unfastened door, rudely constructed of bark, and the hinges of which were of the twisted fibres of the wild hemp, and entered.

The shed, long and low, was windowless, save for two small and unglazed apertures, close to the *chuppur* or thatch, to admit light, and now utter darkness reigned within the wretched, and, as it seemed, deserted, dwelling, while the air was hot and stifling.

Torches were brought, and, by their smoky glare, could be seen the whole interior of the hut, floored with clay, and across the further end of which a bamboo platform, supported by short posts or props of unbarked wood, sustained two or three beds of the humblest kind, a chest of painted wood, and some tall jars, such as those in which food is commonly stored for use.

On one of the beds, that which was nearest to the doorway, lay a human form as if in sleep. The face was averted, but there was no mistaking the uniform that Captain Harrington wore, stained as it was with blood and mire, and torn by thorns.

"My brother! My poor Lionel!" exclaimed Richard

passionately, as he hurried to the side of the pallet on which reclined the prostrate form, and took in his the unresisting hand that was so cold to the touch. "Doctor, for Heaven's sake! see what you can do for him. Poor fellow!"

The surgeon had already placed his practiced fingers on the passive wrist of the recumbent figure. He shook his head, for there was no pulsation, howsoever slight.

"Too late, I am afraid!" was his reluctant verdict when the examination was over. "Life, I should say, must have been extinct at least two hours ago. This has been one of those cases, unless I am much mistaken, in which cholera—the pestilence that walks now among us—has done its fell work with cruel suddenness."

Richard Harrington reeled rather than walked across the hut, and, leaning against the rude doorpost, covered his face with his hands, and sobbed aloud. His outbreak of grief, too bitter, evidently, to be repressed, moved the pity of even the native attendants without, while the young officers who had accompanied him on this sad errand looked ruefully at one another, and knew not what to do. After a brief space, however, Lieutenant Harrington seemed to rally his faculties, and uncovered his face, on which the trace of tears still glistened.

"Don't mind me, Seymour and Graham," he said, in a voice that was not yet quite steady. "You know—and so do you, Sutton—how fond I was of——"

"We all feel for you, Harrington," said the doctor, more gently than it was his wont to speak; "and all respect your natural sorrow for your brave and good brother. Poor lad! I doubt if medical skill could have availed to save him had we been earlier than we were."

And, indeed, the face, which was terribly contorted, bore testimony to Sir Lionel's sufferings. He had, as the surgeon's hasty personal examination proved, received no wound in the fray, the traces of which, in the shape of dust and blood, were on his uniform, and even on his matted hair. His helmet had been lost, and his sword was gone. The condition of his clothes—torn, and mud-bespattered—told of weary struggling through miry swamps and thorny thickets; and it was conjectured that he had made his escape, on foot, from the marauders, into the trackless recesses of the jungle, and, while wandering

there, had been seized by the dread disorder, the unsuspected germs of which he had probably brought with him when he left the camp so gaily on the morning of the ambuscade.

Sir Lionel had not been robbed, either by the plunderers who had carried off the treasure, or by the Pariah charcoal burners, who had found him lying motionless and speechless in the woods. On one of his fingers was still his well-known signet ring, engraved with the Harrington arms. His purse contained gold and silver, untouched; and his watch, a valuable one that had been a present from his father, Sir George, with its chain and trinkets, was yet on his person. Unharméd by steel or shot, but exhausted with heat and fatigue, doubly trying to European constitutions at that season of the year, he had clearly succumbed to the grim pestilence that every day took toll of lives in camp and town.

The charcoal burners to whom the hut belonged were not forthcoming to tell the story that was already known. Motee, when questioned concerning them, shrugged his shoulders. They might not return, he said, for days to come, for such people were superstitious and timid. His Highness the prince had commanded that money should be sent out to them, and food, in reward for their exertions, and most likely they would, after eating, lie down to sleep among the tamarind trees without a thought for the morrow. In any case, they could but relate what little they knew, in their own barbaric tongue, as incomprehensible to the cultured ears of high-caste Hindoos as to the Sahib Harrington himself.

"The man's about right there," said Seymour, authoritatively. "Those jungle wallahs seldom understand a syllable of pure Hindustani, and can but jabber their own jargon, Tamul or Teloogoo or Canarese. I learnt that when I was out shooting with a lot of them for beaters and guides: so it's of small use to speak to them. But it's getting late."

The body was lifted tenderly, and with that reverence which instinct dictates when dealing with the newly dead, from the squalid couch on which it lay, and was placed on the hand litter and covered with a military cloak.

Then the slow, homeward march began, fresh torches being kindled to light the way along the darkling paths

through the forest. It was black night now ; the whirring wings of bat and night hawk as they flew overhead unseen had a ghostly sound ; and once or twice from the cane-brakes was heard the snarling cry of some panther or other beast of prey that resented this nocturnal intrusion. It was late indeed when the cantonments were reached, and the body of the unfortunate young officer, hastily shrouded, and enclosed in one of those shell coffins that the native carpenters were all too busy in making, was laid upon the bed in his own quarters.

CHAPTER IV.

BROUGHT HOME.

THE *Serapis*, homeward bound from Bombay, fought her way gallantly up the Red Sea, in spite of baffling currents and the wind that blew so fiercely from the African coast, and duly steamed through the great Ship Canal that carries out in practice an old dream of Egypt's by-gone rulers.

Not a few among the passengers, kept very much on deck by the stifling heat that in that furnace of a climate alternates with a squall or gale, inquired who was the tall melancholy-eyed young man in black, whose handsome face had in it something strange and striking, and who shunned conversation with his fellow travelers.

Those who were better informed, and notably the steamer's bluff old captain, said the sad-eyed young man was now one of the richest baronets in England, and that his true designation was Sir Richard Harrington, of Greystone Abbey. As Mr. Harrington, however, of the —th Lancers his name was entered on the vessel's books, since he did not, in the melancholy circumstances of the case, choose to assume his title until he should reach his own home.

Those circumstances were indeed of a mournful, and even tragic, character. But a short time had elapsed since the late chief of the family, Sir George, had perished through a railway accident. And within a few days of the announcement of that disaster, the heir of Greystone and his broad acres, the young Sir Lionel, whose praises were on the lips of all who had known him by repute, had sud-

denly met his death in India, in some obscure affray with marauders.

It was soon known to all that, on board the steamer, was the splendid coffin, covered with crimson velvet and enriched with handles and name plate, nails and escutcheon, silver gilt, in fact with all that wealth could do to show honor to the dead, of the brave young officer who had fallen by the hands of foes so ignoble, or, as others whispered, of disease caught in the malarious swamps of the jungle. And rumor declared, accurately enough, that the remains of the luckless young baronet were being brought home for interment in the family mausoleum, and averred that his brother, whose attachment to him was proverbial, was cut to the heart by his loss.

"A fine young fellow, too, every inch of him," said Major Rattan of the native Infantry; "but his brother was the better looking of the two, and one of those youngsters who seem to do everything well—a smart soldier and a thorough gentleman. I remember seeing them both at Delhi, where the —th Lancers were stationed when first they came out from England, though I never knew either of them personally."

Many a pitying glance was cast, by the ladies on board in special, towards the sad-eyed fellow passenger whose history had been recounted to them; but no one ventured to intrude upon his too evident grief.

A P. and O. steamer like most sea-going vessels in a hot climate, what with the constant association at meal times in the sumptuous saloon, and what with the long hours spent in company under the cool awning that throws its shade over the deck, affords plenty of opportunities for becoming informally acquainted. But Sir Richard—to give him his true title—steadily, if unobtrusively, set his face against any such chance intimacies, and seldom exchanged a word save with the officers of the ship.

At Port Said, a letter, lately arrived and duly addressed to "Sir Richard Harrington, Bart.," was put into the young man's hands. This missive, which was decorously edged and sealed with black, was from the land-agent of the Harrington property, Julius Parker by name, and asked for instructions.

The tenantry, Mr. Parker declared, were very desirous of giving their landlord such a welcome as had been usual

at Greystone on the advent of a new heir ; and he went on to speak of triumphal arches and illuminations, and parades of the local yeomanry and volunteers, and similar proofs of the affectionate regard of the neighborhood.

Young Sir Richard lost not a moment in replying, by telegraph, to these well-meant but inopportune suggestions. He thanked his future neighbors for their good-will, but he was peremptory in requesting that nothing which savored of rejoicing should mar the solemn sadness of the occasion.

He expressed a wish that the entrance hall of the old abbey should be hung with black, and that none but emblems of mourning should be visible. And he asked that his return home, bringing with him his dead brother to be laid beside the father who had so lately preceded him to the grave, might be allowed to be as private as possible, and that no attempt at anything like a public reception should be tolerated.

There was some repining when this message reached Greystone, and when Mr. Parker was compelled to countermand preparations which, to save time, he had on his own authority commenced.

There are men who, with their wives and families, see in every event an occasion for a holiday, or perchance for a personal display, and then in that far Northern district there yet lingered something of the old feudal sentiment that cannot survive within hearing of the click of the steam shuttle or the thud of the steam hammer.

Some of the tenantry were proud of the fact that their forefathers, led by Sir Hildebrand Harrington, had followed Prince Rupert's banner at Marston and Naseby, and all had a liking for the ancient family under whose easy sway their predecessors had held their farms in the halcyon days of dear corn and French wars.

It was coal, not pasturage or arable land, that had made the last three baronets so wealthy as they were justly reputed to have been, for although the acreage of the Greystone estates was imposing, the soil itself was not remarkably fertile, and the minerals that lay below the surface had proved by far more valuable than croft or field. However, now that Sir Richard had spoken his mind so plainly, it was, as the agent explained, necessary to defer to his wishes.

The *Scrapis* arrived with proper punctuality at its destined port, and the residue of the journey, of course performed by railway, was uneventful enough.

Mr. Parker, the agent, who had been for a second time communicated with by telegraph, had done his best to carry out the desire of his new employer, and when the mournful *cortège* reached Greystone, the gateway and the vast outer hall of the grand old abbey were found to have been draped with black, while the serving men, in their black liveries, stood drawn up in double file to receive their young master.

On the house front was a hatchment, freshly painted with the heraldic insignia of the Harringtons, veiled with crape, while a black flag floated from the turret flagstaff, and the deep sound of tolling bells came floating from the tower of the distant church.

At the railway station, six miles off, there had been no attempt at a demonstration of welcome. A carriage had been there, of course, as well as the hearse that had been ordered, and Mr. Parker had taken the respectful liberty of awaiting his principal on the platform: but that was all.

The funeral of the late Captain Harrington—of that young Sir Lionel who had been cut off so early—took place on the fourth day after the arrival at Greystone Abbey of the remains of its late lord. A fine funeral it was acknowledged to be, even by the poor, who are close critics and keen observers of such gloomy pageants.

Mr. Parker, having *carte blanche* as to expense, had invoked the aid of a fashionable London undertaker, and the show lacked for nothing that taste and money could provide. Black plumes, black velvet, the sleekest and stateliest of black steeds, a hearse majestic enough to have been one of Pluto's State carriages, Parma violets, silver-tipped wands to be borne by well-drilled mutes, a pall stiff with embroidery in gold thread—all the upholstery and millinery of sorrow figured there. But in addition to this there were the long line of carriages, and the longer line of pedestrians, whose presence proved the respect in which the name of Harrington was held in that countryside, and the personal sympathy which had been drawn forth by the untimely end of the young head of the house.

There was a chapel attached to Greystone Abbey—when

was a monastic pile without one?—and beneath the flagstones of its aisles and chancel many a mitred abbot and prior and monk had been laid in earth of old time. But the chapel had been disused since that stormy day when the Sir Gilbert Harrington of the period came with armed men and the king's warrant to drive the brethren forth, to starve or beg as they listed, and was a mere picturesque and roofless ruin.

In the Parish church, and in what was called the Harrington aisle, was the grand tomb of that ancient family, a mausoleum as superb as marble and bronze and gold leaf could make it, and it was that Sir Lionel might repose here amid ancestral coffins that his body had with such tender care been brought back from the far-off country where he had prematurely perished. The bells tolled for him as they had tolled but recently for his father, Sir George.

On young Sir Richard, the chief mourner, all eyes were turned, as he followed his brother to the grave, and it was towards him that the good-will of the spectators seemed to turn as iron seeks the magnet.

“Poor lad—for he be little else”—remarked more than one buxom north-country dame to her yeoman husband. “A heavy heart he has, I’ll be bound, to look so sad as he does, and he so young and so comely too! But I mind the brother that died in the Indies was bonnier even than he, for I’ve seen him pass, shooting, by our farm.”

“Yes, fine young fellows, both,” the less imaginative farmer would reply; and so the procession moved on.

At last the funeral was over, the assembly dispersed, and it was duly chronicled in the county newspapers how Sir Lionel Harrington, Bart., had been laid to rest at Greystone among his kith and kin.

CHAPTER V.

AT HURST ROYAL.

IN the great drawing room at Hurst Royal, the last and largest of a stately suite, and of which the ceiling and the walls were gorgeous with such painting and carved work

as, since the middle of the eighteenth century, have never been attempted in English homes, the only daughter of the owner of the mansion sat alone : of the most noble owner, indeed, according to old fashioned terms of courtesy, for the house was that of the Marquess of Cheviot, and his daughter, admitted to be the most beautiful girl in that northern county, was the Lady Egeria Fitzurse.

Very beautiful, sad, and pensive she now looked, with her raven-black hair, the large blue eyes, that are perhaps loveliest when associated with a wealth of ebon locks, and a face and figure comparable to the noblest ideal of some gifted sculptor.

To the arts of dress she owed nothing. Her well-fitted costume was of the simplest black silk, and there was not so much as the glitter of an ornament to relieve it. A book lay unopened on the table beside her, but she seemed to have forgotten it, as she sat with clasped hands gazing dreamily before her. Her thoughts, evidently, were far away.

The great drawing room of Hurst Royal has a pleasant outlook, across a rose garden, then bright with summer flowers ; across the wide park, with its mighty trees and rolling lawns and silvery stretch of swan-haunted water, until the prospect was bounded by blue hills of picturesque outline.

A magnificent room it was, splendid with gold and color ; but there were those who thought that the true boast of Hurst Royal was the grand outer hall, the oldest part of the mansion, and which dated from a period earlier than the Norman Conquest itself, although traditionally said to have been planned by a Norman architect.

On a Norman Vavasour, at any rate, if there be faith in charters, Raoul Fitzurse, had fief and mansion been bestowed by King Edward the Confessor, and it was in that very hall that legend affirmed the marvelous cure of Sir Raoul's eldest child, sick almost unto death, by the blessing and the touch of that consecrated monarch, on the occasion of the visit which was the origin of the name of Hurst Royal.

Good folk in the eleventh century saw no difficulty in accepting the story. Had not the holy Edward, Confessor and King, not merely been made a saint while yet alive, but was not his power to work miracles as well attested as any event in Saxon hagiography ?

At any rate, there stood the fine old hall, with its massive stones and beams of immemorial oak, blackened by time ; and there could be no reasonable doubt that it was still possessed by the ancient race whose founder had been a foreign courtier of the last English king of Cerdic's line.

So absorbed in thought had Lady Egeria been that she had failed to hear the tread of horses on the gravel without, or the loud clang of the hall bell, so that when the door of the grand drawing-room was thrown open, and "Sir Richard Harrington" announced by an obsequious groom of the chambers, she was all but startled by the abruptness of the transition of ideas.

Lady Egeria half rose, and with quiet courtesy bowed her head, and then the visitor took the chair which the servant placed for him, and these two were left alone. It was evident that the new lord of Greystone Abbey was but very slightly acquainted with the family at Huist Royal, although a friendship of long date had existed between the house of Fitzurse and that of Harrington.

It so happened that the most noble the Marquess of Cheviot had, during his married life, lived very much away from the county of which he was now Lord Lieutenant. It so happened also that Richard Harrington, since his boyhood, had been less frequently at home than was his brother. There was thus no sort of intimacy between the young baronet and his distinguished neighbor.

"Papa is from home, Sir Richard, though I expect him hourly to return," said Lady Egeria. "He will regret to have missed the pleasure of seeing you, I am sure."

The sad-eyed young master of Greystone said that the regret would be mutual. He had chosen this visit as the first to return, in recognition of a call which Lord Cheviot had kindly paid him.

It was now some ten days since the funeral, at which the marquess had made a point of being present, for the sake of old friendship with the late Sir George. All this talk was very frigid and formal, but when Sir Richard made some mention of Lady Egeria's absent brother, a friend, as he believed, of poor Lionel, a sudden change came over the beautiful statue, as he had in his heart almost pronounced her to be, with whom he was conversing. Her blue eyes swam in tears, evoked by the mention of that name.

"Yes, Sir Richard," said Lady Egeria, earnestly, "my

father and I were both shocked and sorry when we heard of—of the cruel misfortune that has befallen you. We feel for you, indeed ! ”

She put out her hand, as she spoke, to meet his, and he bowed gravely as their fingers for the first time met.

“ I thank you for your kind speech, and the kind thought that prompted it,” said the young baronet in a voice that quivered with emotion. Lord Norham, I think, will be sorry too, for he knew my poor brother well, though I scarcely remember to have exchanged a word with him myself.”

“ Yes, Harold will feel it very much when he learns the news—has learned it perhaps. He is away in Norway, with his yacht and his fishing rods,” she added, “ and changes his quarters so frequently that it is often long before our letters reach him.”

Harold was Lord Norham, it need scarcely be said, only son and heir to the marquess, and as wayward and erratic a young nobleman as ever declined public life and parliamentary aspirations.

Sometimes he was, as now, in Norway, roving among islets and fiords and fells for the more zealous persecution of salmon and reindeer. Anon the society journals would chronicle him as in Arabia, mixing himself up with turbaned pilgrims or Wahabee fanatics, and bent on reaching some remote oasis, or gaining access to some mosque never profaned by Christian foot, and attractive by reason of the prestige of peril. And then he would be heard of as a mighty hunter west of the Rocky Mountains, or perchance in South Africa, with a choice assortment of smoothbores and express rifles, and wearying out his dusky guides by the unsparing eagerness of his pursuit of elk and seacow, elephant and lion.

He had a stable of good horses at Melton Mowbray, but seldom rode them over the green fields of Leicestershire, and was yet more seldom an ornament of Rotten Row or to London parties, while neither his father nor his would-be constituents could ever persuade him to represent Wortham, a borough which the marquess still believed to be almost as much his own by hereditary usage as the freehold of Hurst Royal in that House of Commons from which he shrank with positive aversion.

And then Sir Richard went on to say how general and

widespread, in that part of India whence he had come, had been the expression of sympathy for his brother's untimely fate.

The conversation lasted thus for a few minutes, when, as Sir Richard was in the act of rising to take his leave, the sound of wheels was heard, and almost immediately afterwards the marquess came in, with outstretched hand and genial courtesy, to bid his young neighbor welcome to Hurst Royal.

"I knew Sir George very well—very well indeed—at one time of my life," said the marquess; "and your poor brother too; so that I feel, Sir Richard, as if you and I ought to be friends, as those who have borne the names of Harrington and Fitzurse before us have been for many a year."

A pleasant-spoken, fine-looking old man was the Most Noble the Marquess, chronicled in the "Peerage" as Marquess and Earl of Cheviot, Earl of Norham, Baron Norham, and Baron Fitzurse, K.G. He had a healthy, pink face, and grey hair that became him well enough, and was simply what he seemed, an unaffected, hearty, generous gentleman of high degree. He never lost sight of the fact that his exalted position entailed duties as well as conferred rights, and these duties he had faithfully tried to discharge, to the best of his power, throughout his life. And it was a source of vexation to him that Harold his son, cleverer, as his father frankly owned, than the present wearer of the strawberry-leaved coronet, could not be brought to see that he had duties too, and to do something for the country in which he had so large a stake.

"I have just come back from Silverseam. I went over there to have a talk with the men this morning," said the marquess, after a few more words had been exchanged. "Perhaps you may have heard, Sir Richard, of the bad example which my people are setting there. It ought—excuse me—to have an interest for yourself, since you are the owner of as many collieries as belong to me."

"I have heard," answered the baronet, after an instant's thought, "that some of the miners on your property, Lord Cheviot, are on strike."

"Indeed they are, and at Silverseam in particular," said the marquess, emphatically, for Silverseam was a pit of especial value, and its produce commanded the highest

price in the market. "Silly fellows! they are resolved to kill the goose that has laid golden eggs for generations past, and only think of coercing me, and not a bit of the empty cupboards and the pale children they would soon see in their homes if they hold out. I told them I could wait, and would shut up the pit for the next ten years if they chose, but that I would not be bullied into unreasonable terms; and I pointed out how good and steady their wages had been for years, and how the standard of comfort had improved during my own recollection, and they could not deny the truth of what I said; but I soon saw, by the obstinate look on their faces, that they would not be convinced. Some London agitator has got hold of them, and bewitched them, I think, and they are quite ready to pinch their own families if they can thwart me. And yet I've been their friend, when I knew how."

"So I have heard, Lord Cheviot," responded Sir Richard, "short as my stay at Greystone has been. I hope, however, soon to hear that the colliers have listened to reason."

Soon after this he rose to go, declining all hospitable proffers of refreshment after his ride, but replying neatly enough to the gracious words in which at parting his noble host expressed a wish that their acquaintance might ripen into intimacy.

"For we are very near neighbors, are we not?" added Lord Cheviot; and it was quite true that but a trifling distance separated the Abbey from Hurst Royal.

"A nice young fellow enough; but I think I liked his brother best, eh, Egeria—what say you?" was the marquess' remark when the door had closed upon the departing guest.

"It is difficult to tell how we may like any one, after so brief an acquaintance," replied his daughter, turning her face away.

"Very true," said Lord Cheviot, glancing up at the portrait of his late wife, which hung on the wall above, as if to ask her opinion of the new master of Greystone. "Well, these rebels of mine at Silverseam have taken up more of my time than I reckoned upon, and I have letters to write before the post bag goes out."

The marquess therefore repaired to the library, the room in which he habitually passed his time, and was soon

deep in the correspondence from which a great peer can hardly be exempt, and which the head of the house of Fitzurse certainly never tried to shirk.

Meanwhile Sir Richard Harrington rode slowly homeward, so slowly as to astonish the groom who followed him, and who knew his master's preference for quick riding. He was evidently deep in meditation, with his hat pulled down over his knitted brows. And yet his thoughts were not with his dead brother, but with the lovely girl he had just left, and whom he had found alone at this his first entry into Hurst Royal, the beautiful statue that for one moment, as by the art of magic, had seemed to be quickened with warm life, and had then sunk back into almost the repose of the chiselled marble to which he had likened her.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE BLUE BOUDOIR.

WHEN once more alone, Lady Egeria again rose, and, with her head erect, and her statuesque figure looking pre-eminently graceful, crossed the grand old hall that in ancestral days had witnessed many a feast and many a council, and, with slow step, went up the wide, open staircase, with its ancient ballustrades, carved with flowers and foliage, and, as she passed on, sadly, but almost inaudibly, murmured the words—

“My love! My love!”

She traversed the wide gallery that runs round the huge hall, and, opening a door, found herself in the pretty morning room, hung with blue silk, and commanding a view of the wild hills to the westward, and of a little lakelet, rock bordered, which was included in the grounds of Hurst Royal, which was her own peculiar domain. Once there, she rang the bell nearest to her hand. Her French maid glided in almost as soon as the bell was touched.

“Louise,” inquired her mistress, “do you know if Miss Mavina is still waiting below, or whether she **has returned home?**”

“She waits, miladi,” replied, with a strong Provencal accent, the maid who had been called Louise, and whose swarthy cheek and black eyes told that she was from the south. “Yes, Miss Mavina Malstock is still downstairs, and waits your ladyship’s commands.”

“I will see her now,” rejoined Lady Egeria, indifferently.

Now Mavina Malstock did not at all like being kept waiting below, either in the little green drawing-room or in the rich and spacious conservatory, while Lady Egeria received visitors of her own rank. Nevertheless, she came, radiant, into the room, her face dressed in smiles and beaming with affectionate regard for her aristocratic friend. A pretty girl enough, but of a strange style of prettiness, and with an undefined something in her expression that ought not, perhaps, to have inspired the confidence that we instinctively accord to the candid and the frank. Her complexion was clear and pale; her features good; her abundant hair was delicately fine, and almost flaxen, contrasting strangely with a pair of Oriental eyes; long, sleepy eyes of darkest grey, fringed with dark lashes, such eyes as suit the Persian or the Arab, but are rarely seen here at home. Mavina was the daughter of the Wortham doctor—Dr Malstock by courtesy—one of those useful practitioners whose gigs are familiar with every by-road for miles around.

She had been a *protégée* of the late marchioness, now dead some three years, and who had once been a reigning beauty, then a leader of London society, and who, to the end of her career, had retained the frivolous and worldly habits of her fashionable life.

It had been one of the marchioness’ whims to patronize, as a child and as a grown girl, Mavina Malstock. The doctor’s daughter had a fine voice and much musical talent, and Lady Cheviot had spared no cost in providing for her such advantages of tuition as London alone could supply. Presents and petting and education were the benefits for which Mavina had to thank the great lady at Hurst Royal, and, when she died, the marchioness had recommended her to her daughter’s goodwill.

“Be kind to poor Mavina,” Lady Cheviot had said, exactly as if speaking of some four-footed favorite, and Lady Egeria had complied with her mother’s wish, and had

never forgotten her humble friend at Wortham, a town some three miles distant from Hurst Royal by the carriage road, and within an easy walk by stiles and footpath.

"I fear you are tired of waiting for me," said Lady Egeria, graciously.

"To see you, dear Lady Egeria, I could wait for ever!" was the effusive answer. "Your kindness and your friendship are the only comfort I have now, since at home, as you know, my lips are sealed, and I never so much as mention *his* name."

"I know that, and I am sorry there should be such restraint," said Lady Egeria, gently. "Sit down here by me, then, and let me know the news, if you have any."

"I called at the post office on my way here," said Miss Malstock, despondently; "and always with the same result: 'No letter for you to-day, miss!' I have learned to hate the words that imply a heartbreak to me, for, Lady Egeria, I love him very dearly."

"Poor Mavina! Poor girl!" said her noble friend, quite tenderly, for there was a ring of truth in the last speech that touched her. "Have you seen the lawyer—that Mr. —?"

Lady Egeria hesitated here, and it was Mavina who completed the sentence. "Holt, Lady Egeria—Jasper Holt. Yes, I have seen him, and he has promised to do what he can for me, especially since I told him of your ladyship's kind offer to——"

"To pay him for his work, most certainly. I would do more than that for you, Mavina, in a matter on which you feel so deeply," returned the marquess' daughter. "The man is, I believe, a sharp solicitor, and, perhaps, he may be able to prosecute inquiries that would be impossible to you or me. This long, unbroken silence is, I admit, very singular indeed."

"It is—indeed it is!" earnestly replied Mavina, bending forward, and fixing her dilating eyes on the beautiful face of her patroness. "It is so unlike my poor Walter. Rolling stone and ne'er-do-well as his ill-wishers called Walter Travis, he was always true to me; and in all his wanderings never failed to write—never! And now three of my letters have remained unanswered, and my very birthday, which, as he well knew, was last week, has been unnoticed. He never failed to write to me before wherever

he was—in China, in Australia, or in India. I am sure there is something wrong.”

“Might not his employer have sent him on some mission far up the country, perhaps, and where even a post office may be a rarity?” suggested Lady Egeria, after a moment’s meditation.

Mavina Malstock shook her head. “I think he would have written before he went,” she said, slowly. “There must be something amiss—something wrong.”

“Or,” hinted Lady Egeria, “he may have determined to try his fortune elsewhere, and this may have caused the delay. It is a mere conjecture, of course.”

“Drowning men catch at straws, they say,” replied Miss Malstock, half bitterly; “and I would welcome any idea that should make me fancy Walter alive and well—anything but that he had grown tired of caring for me. I should like that, I confess!” she added, with a quivering lip, as she tried to smile.

Lady Egeria was certain, from all that she had heard, that there was no ground for such a tormenting doubt.

“If ever there was a case of true love and constancy,” she said, “those qualities seem to exist, my poor friend, in this Mr. Travis and yourself. And I should be glad if, as in the story books, the usual reward of true lovers should be yours.”

“He will never come back, unless in prosperity—rich and successful, I mean, Lady Egeria,” said Mavina, decisively. “And ill luck has pursued him so consistently from the day of his leaving England. Even for my sake—and he does care for me—he would not meet the sneers and cold looks of those near here who knew him as a boy, and return as poor as he went out. On that one point his resolve is like steel. You never saw him, Lady Egeria?”

“Never,” replied Miss Malstock’s strangely-chosen confidante. “The name I know well, and I can remember the old Admiral, his father, as dining here at Hurst Royal when I was very young. He died years ago, I understand, and Mr. Walter Travis has now no home to go to.”

Mavina admitted that such was the case. The prospects, she said, of her betrothed had not for some time past appeared, either to her or to him, as particularly hopeful or brilliant, but such as they were she was convinced that he would not have thrown them over lightly. And then

she went on to speak of her interview with the solicitor, Jasper Holt.

“He thinks there is something bad—something unfair—about the business,” she said, “and he is a shrewd, sharp attorney, good at ferreting out evidence. He heard me out patiently enough, and made some notes of what I told him. The difficulty at first was to make him take a real interest in affairs so far away, but, partly by the mention of your name, my lady, I got him to declare that he would be active in the matter. And, perhaps, Lady Egeria, if you would condescend to see him——”

But this was not a duty of friendship which Lady Egeria was willing to assume.

“I would do much for you, Mavina, and my purse shall be at your disposal, whatever may be the expense of the inquiry,” she said, “but I had rather not confer with this Mr. Holt. Papa,” she added, “who would not dream of employing him, would not be pleased if I were to encourage him to come to Hurst Royal. But I think you have chosen well in applying to him to help you professionally, and money shall not be spared, on my part, though I prefer to have no actual communication with Mr. Holt.”

And indeed the name of Jasper Holt, occasionally mentioned by the marquess, and not in terms of praise or liking, was by no means in good odor in that aristocratic mansion.

Mavina was profuse in her thanks. The lawyer, she explained, had some correspondent—a connection, indeed—in that part of the country in which Walter Travis was a resident. And the lawyer had promised to write to this correspondent in terms sufficiently urgent to ensure a prompt reply by letter or telegraph.

“The next time you can spare me a few minutes, dear, dear friend, I hope I may have better news to tell,” said Miss Malstock, as at length she rose to go.

And Lady Egeria touched her hand at parting, and bade her be of good cheer, and then Mavina, half smiling, half tearful, got herself out of the blue boudoir and down the stately stairs, and trudged back along the well-remembered footpath that led towards her own humbler home at Worham.

CHAPTER VII.

JASPER HOLT.

THE post bag at Greystone Abbey did not arrive till later than the customary hour for the delivery of letters at an English country house, and it was nearly one o'clock when Sir Richard, in his library, received the bag, and with a preoccupied air, and almost mechanically, unlocked it and examined its contents. Newspapers and letters there were in plenty. Seldom, in these days of circulars, of anniversaries, bubble companies, and sanguine projectors, can a man in so conspicuous a position as was Sir Richard Harrington escape a hail shower of applications to take shares, lend his name, or subscribe for purposes more or less benevolent or profitable. Short, however, as had been his tenure of the property, he had already learned that there is a sameness in such proposals, and that the waste-paper basket is a domestic maelstrom best fitted to engulf nine-tenths of the volunteer correspondence of the period.

Suddenly Sir Richard's listless look vanished as he espied, lurking among the other packets, like Cleopatra's asp among the pomegranates and purple grape clusters, a letter from India. He had read and replied to letters from India since his return from that country, as was but natural. His kind old colonel had written, so had four or five of his brother officers; but these missives he had received with perfect equanimity.

When Seymour, or Conyers, or Graham—good fellows all—wrote to him, what mattered it that they dated from Futtehpore instead of from Aldershot? The only difference was they talked of pig sticking and snipe shooting and tiffins, instead of tennis and afternoon tea and jaunts to the races.

This letter, however, not even enclosed in an envelope, but stiffly folded and formally addressed, in a quaint, crabbed, but very legible hand, attracted attention by the very peculiarity of its appearance.

Somehow, the baronet hesitated to open it, until, after growing ashamed at his own timidity, he roughly broke the seal, unfolded the document, and began to read. As he did so, his color faded away, and his face grew white and set and hard as marble.

The letter was not a very long one. It was penned in the same quaint hand as that in which the address had been written—the hand of a person well accustomed to write, but not, perhaps, to write in the English language and the Roman characters. Nevertheless, the letter, which was oddly expressed, but as to grammar faultless, was wholly in English, though the signature was in Persian or Arabic characters, while below it was an elaborate seal or stamp, impressed on the paper, according to Oriental usage, not in wax, but in ink of pale blue color.

Three times, and yet a fourth, did the owner of Greystone peruse that letter, and then, with a heavy frown and firmly compressed lips, he carefully refolded it and placed it in an inner breast pocket of his coat.

He left the library, snatched his hat, and for the next hour or so, with folded arms and downcast look, paced to and fro along a terrace of the garden, where high hedges of ancient yew, clipped and trained, shielded him from prying eyes.

The luncheon hour came, and the gong duly sounded, but, to the dismay of the old butler, not a morsel could the young master of the Abbey bring himself to touch. Very late he went into the dining-room and tossed off two glasses of sherry, and then rang the bell sharply.

“Tell them to saddle my horse, Morris,” he said, in a harsher tone than was usual with him, for Sir Richard was a smoothly-spoken personage; “the chestnut, and to be quick about it. I want no groom after me to-day.”

Now among the saddle horses at Greystone Abbey, which had a well-stored stable, there were two chestnut horses, both of which the baronet had occasionally ridden.

“Did you mean Mayfly, Sir Richard, please, or Wild——” the butler was beginning, when he was savagely interrupted.

“Confound the brute’s name! What can it matter so that he can carry me?” burst out the baronet, and then seemed to remember that his irritability might be ill construed. “Never mind, Morris,” he said, with some attempt at good humor; “I have had something to worry

me : that's all. Wildfire let it be, by all means ; but tell James he will not be wanted to go with me to-day."

Wildfire, a fine hunter, of whose prowess across country the late Sir George had been vain, was soon saddled and brought round, and Richard Harrington mounted and rode off as composedly as he could, until he was past the lodge gate and out of his own grounds. Then he struck his spurs into Wildfire's flanks, and dashed off at a furious pace along an unfrequented bridle road, which, as he well knew, afforded the shortest cut from Greystone to Wortham.

When he reached the outskirts of the borough, he drew rein, and looked about him. Presently he caught sight of a boy, a lathy lad of fourteen, in shabby fustian, and with unkempt, dark hair protruding from beneath a battered billycock hat.

"Do you know Mr. Holt's house, my lad?" called out the baronet.

"Lawyer Holt? Yes, I does," rejoined the boy, after an instant's conference with himself.

"Then show me where he lives, and I'll give you a shilling for your trouble. Hold my horse while I'm in the office, and instead of a shilling, it shall be half-a-crown."

"Done with you, governor!" replied the boy, whose aspect suggested poaching, selling "correct cards" at race meetings, and other precarious methods of earning a livelihood. "This way, please—by the lime kiln, and round by the mill."

And he broke into a shambling run that kept with the trot of Harrington's powerful horse, until they reached the quiet street where, on the green door of a modest red-brick house, glittered the brass door-plate on which was inscribed, "Mr. J. Holt, Solicitor."

Sir Richard swung himself lightly down from the saddle, put the reins into the grimy hand of his guide, and rang the door bell. An office lad, with inky fingers and a threadbare coat, the only apology for a clerk whom Mr. Holt could or did afford to maintain, came promptly at the sound.

"Mr. Holt's within, sir. Please step in," he said, respectfully ; and, bidding the boy who held the horse walk that animal up and down, but keep near, the baronet entered.

"Say 'Sir Richard Harrington would be glad of a few

minutes' conversation on business,' " said the visitor, in a voice that probably was quite audible, not merely in the narrow passage, but in the office itself, the door of which was instantly opened.

" Pray walk in, sir ! " said Jasper Holt. " I am quite at your service for the moment, and you, Mivers, can just step round to the County Court bailiff's office, and ask if those writs are made out yet."

Mivers, the office lad, was too well used to his master's ways, and too aware of the contracted space of the legal premises, to manifest surprise, but took down his hat from its peg, and went, leaving the coast clear.

Inducted into the office, littered with papers and parchments, and seated in a chair hastily cleared for him, Sir Richard took a survey of his host, whom he had never seen, but of whom he had, in earlier years, often heard, as of a shrewd practitioner, bold and unscrupulous, who defended poachers, vindicated the characters of servants dismissed for theft, and made himself generally obnoxious to the magnates and respectabilities of Wortham and its neighborhood. He could not but own that the attorney was, in appearance, a very remarkable person.

Jasper Holt, though partly bald, and with a fringe of jet-black hair falling on his coat collar, though ungainly of figure, very short and very broad, was almost handsome by reason of the energy and intelligence that his strongly-marked countenance had impressed on all its lineaments. He was still young—or, at any rate youngish—and had very white teeth and very firm lips ; a high forehead ; the blackest of whiskers ; and eyes that were bright—over-bright—audacious eyes that never flinched, and that seldom failed to read the inner nature of those with whom he came in contact, and of whose foibles, if fame spoke truly, he was not slow to take advantage.

" What can I do for you, Sir Richard ? " asked the lawyer, as coolly as if clients of the baronet's calibre were often seen in his exiguous domains ; as coolly as if he did not know that Gudge and Tatham, of Crown Street, Wortham, had been the Harrington family solicitors for three generations past.

" I want your help, Mr. Holt," said the baronet, blandly ; " and on your discretion I feel sure that I can rely."

" You are pleased to be complimentary, Sir Richard,"

replied Jasper, with his dubious smile. "My discretion, and my poor wits and knowledge of the law, are at the disposal of my clients. I shall be pleased, myself, if I am to understand that our relations are to be those of lawyer and client."

The young chief of the house of Harrington bowed assent.

"I should not have trespassed on your valuable time, Mr. Holt, were it not that there is business of importance on which I desire to consult you."

Jasper Holt's white teeth and black eyes seemed to glisten with unholy lustre as he rubbed his large hands together and reiterated the expression of his willingness to be helpful.

"I wonder—I do wonder why he does not go to Gudge and Tatham, and, if not, what is the dirty work that he wants me to do." Thus ran the attorney's thoughts, but nothing of this betrayed itself in the expression of his eyes or mouth.

"The fact is, Mr. Holt, that I am in need of—of a considerable sum of ready money," was the baronet's reluctant confession.

"Whew!" returned Jasper, arching his thick eyebrows, and as completely astonished as a man of his experience could be. Commonplace and customary as it is to be in want of that useful commodity, Mr. Holt had never dreamed that the young master of Greystone could, for years to come, have any difficulty on that score. The Wortham lawyer knew to a nicety the average amount of Sir Richard's large income, and knew, too, how hard it was for the veriest spendthrift to make much progress, in a few weeks, on the dismal road to ruin.

"I should say, Sir Richard, that money, with your resources, could be easily raised," said Jasper. "May I ask the amount that you require, and how soon?"

"The money should be ready in six weeks. The amount would be seventeen thousand pounds, to be borrowed on mortgage, I suppose," said Sir Richard, twisting his moustache.

The solicitor stared a little. "It is a large sum," he said, slowly; "not, of course, large in proportion to your great rent roll, Sir Richard, or the extent of your fine property, which is, I believe, unencumbered; but still a

lump of money on which to lay one's hands so quickly, the more particularly if, as I divine, you would prefer the business to be kept quite private."

"Quite private, if you please," was the decisive answer. "I have no wish to set neighboring gossips talking as to my affairs."

"That's why he was ashamed to call on the Crown Street slow coaches," reflected Jasper, irreverently, and then said that he had no doubt that he could find a lender who would be discreet as well as accommodating, though perhaps the rate of interest might be——"

"Hang the interest!" broke out the baronet, impatiently. "I'll pay it, whatever it is, if only this matter is properly managed. You see, Mr. Holt, that I got into a scrape out there in India—no fault of mine, perhaps, but so it is—and I must pay the penalty. I have had notice that bills to the amount of seventeen thousand pounds have been drawn upon me by a Parsee firm at Bombay, Trisetjee and Son, and will be presented for payment at my London bankers in seven weeks from this date or less. It is essential that these bills should be honored, and I look to you to provide for it. I will sign anything, or agree to anything, in reason, but I wish the whole story of the borrowing to be kept——"

"Dark!" put in the smiling lawyer, completing the sentence—"dark as the grave, Sir Richard, ha! ha!" and then, as he noticed his visitor's mourning attire, and saw a look of disgust flit across his face, suddenly became as serious as an owl.

"I had better write you a line, Sir Richard, when I have had time to look round," he said, civilly. "By Tuesday or Wednesday next I hope I shall have found some moneyed party on whom I can rely. And then perhaps we could arrange an interview?"

Sir Richard assented, thanked Mr. Holt for coming so promptly into his views, and then, though not with a very good grace, shook hands with his new legal adviser, and left the office. He put the promised half-crown into the boy's ready hand, and, grasping Wildfire's bridle, mounted, and was about to ride off, when an idea struck him.

"What's your name, my boy?" he asked.

"Jerry, sir!" was the answer.

"Then, Jerry, you'll not recollect me unless I remember

you," said the baronet. "Do as I bid you, and more half-crowns may come in your way yet."

"I'm fly, governor!" said the lad, with a grin and a touch of his battered hat, and then Sir Richard started to return to Greystone.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHY DO I NOT LIKE HIM?"

THERE was a garden party at Old Court, a country house not very far from Hurst Royal, at which Lady Egeria, and her father also, had promised to be present. Indeed, Mr. Redmayne—they always called him Squire in his own parish—his wife, his son, and his comely daughters were among those neighbors of whom the marquess and Lady Egeria saw the most. The latter had asked for an invitation for Mavina Malstock, and had found herself, as it were, compelled to drive over with her in what she called her basket to Old Court, the marquess as usual preferring to ride, although she would have liked better to go alone.

Lady Egeria had two carriages in general use. There was the great yellow barouche, emblazoned with coronets, lined with white silk, and drawn by high-stepping greys. But the favorite equipage was the shell-shaped basket, small and low, with its four cream-colored ponies, faultless and well matched, and its two tiny postillions in dark green, while another child in livery sat demurely perched behind, his arms folded and his back turned towards his noble mistress, the seat being one reversed as on a dogcart.

It was not long before the lodge gates of the squire's little park, and the fine half-timbered house, built towards the close of the fifteenth century, were reached, but already the rest of the guests, not very numerous, had assembled.

Lady Egeria's well-fitting robe of white serge, trimmed and fastened with bows of lilac ribbon, her long and perfectly adjusted gloves, and the small toque of lilac that rested on her raven hair, set off the graceful stateliness of her figure to the fullest advantage. Never had she looked lovelier.

Mavina, too, attracted notice. In her light-blue costume, and hat trimmed with marguerites, she looked certainly a very pretty girl. Alice and Maude Redmayne were pretty, too, and so were the two daughters of Mr. Hammond, the rector of the parish in which Hurst Royal lay, and there were some four or five other young ladies with some pretensions to good looks.

For but one face, however, had Sir Richard Harrington, as the phrase goes, any eyes. He had been made welcome at Hurst Royal on several occasions since paying his first formal call ; had dined there repeatedly ; had won golden opinions, perhaps on account of his being an admirable listener when he chose, from the good-natured marquess, and was rumored to be Lady Egeria's devoted admirer. He was himself of a goodlier presence than any of the male guests, eclipsing even handsome Harry Redmayne, the heir of Old Court, who was in the Guards, and of whom his sisters, themselves much admired, were excessively proud.

It was a pleasant party, though not a large one. There were courts, of course, for tennis, and there was archery, and a big white marquee had been pitched on the lawn among the great elms, wherein a sumptuous luncheon had been provided. After a brief delay, during which the groups were chatting on the lawn or sauntering under the trees, the squire came forward to offer his arm and to lead Lady Egeria into the tent, followed two and two by the other guests, of whom the marquess, with Mrs. Redmayne, brought up the rear.

A handsome luncheon it was, with its pretty show of fresh-gathered flowers and crystal and silver, and all the more appetizing beneath that snowy roof of canvas, above which gay flags fluttered, while the music of the band without came merrily streaming in, along with the summer air, through the doorway.

The liveried servants caught the spirit of the occasion, and waited more briskly and intelligently on the company than ever they had done within doors, and the popping of champagne corks and the clatter of knives and forks mingled with bursts of silvery laughter and the sound of animated voices.

The good squire of Old Court was the very soul of hospitable kindness. Most of those present knew each other

well, and the very curates forgot to be shy within ten minutes of their being seated at the well-spread board.

Luncheon over, the business, or rather the sports, of the day began. In Clara and Lucy Hammond, the rector's second and third daughters, the givers of the entertainment had secured the two best tennis players in that division of the county, while with the bow Maud Redmayne, winner of silver arrows and gold medals at many an archery meeting, was unsurpassed.

Then there was boating on an ornamental sheet of water, studded with willow islets, and there was, later on, a dance got up in a pavilion that was called the summer house, and that stood on a broad grassy terrace, up and down which the peacocks habitually strutted.

Yes, it was a pleasant party, on that hot and cloudless day, when not the most inveterate croaker could spy out a cloud to threaten one of those untimely showers that in our variable climate so often mar a joyous, open-air assembly.

It was out of pure good nature that Lady Egeria had contrived that Mavina Malstock should be amongst the invited. The girl, she knew, was fretful and despondent about the lover of whom, as yet, she had heard no tidings; and it would be well for her, so her patroness deemed, that she should have something to distract her thoughts of such dark imaginings as those that usually haunted her.

Sir Richard's attentions to the beautiful daughter of his noble neighbor were marked, but they were gracefully rendered, and there was nothing in the fact of his admiration to challenge censure or comment. There seemed to be no reason why a young baronet of great fortune and long descent should not aspire to the daughter of a marquess, and probably Lord Cheviot, who often eulogized his new friend, would have been willing enough to receive him as a son-in-law.

With Lady Egeria herself it was very different. She almost blamed herself for the groundless aversion, the shrinking and dislike, that she could not quite repress, and which made Sir Richard odious to her. Fair of face and soft of voice though he was, gentle as were his manners, brave and honorable as he was thought to be, she was never quite at ease in his company, and responded in no way to what his words and looks implied. She was polite in her replies to his efforts to please, but nothing more.

The two sets of tennis players plied their rackets. There were young men enough present to keep up so popular a game without any aid from Sir Richard Harrington, who declined to take part in the contest. Lady Egeria never played tennis; nor, therefore, would he. The sun shone hotly down, and the competitors were not sorry when champagne cup and claret cup, alternating with ices and coffee, were brought round.

"This weather must make you fancy yourself in India again," said the kindly marquess to Sir Richard, who was too politic to undeceive his noble friend as to the superior potency of that globe of fire that in the flaming Indian heaven rains its fiery darts on yellow plain and steaming jungle.

"You would find it cooler, I think, Lady Egeria," said the young baronet, "down by the lake there, where the tall elms throw such a shadow over the water. Here, I think, there is less shade than anywhere else in the grounds. If you will accept me as your guide——"

He offered his escort as he spoke, and with a cold bow Lady Egeria accepted it; and the two walked together towards the ornamental sheet of water, with its pinnace and boats lying ready to hand, its willow fringed isles, and flotillas of aquatic birds, differing in size and color.

"The squire is proud of his black swans. They were a present sent him by a nephew who has settled in Australia, I believe," said Lady Egeria, after the silence had grown painful. "I do not think, Sir Richard, that you have these in India."

"No; Indian swans are white, like English ones," replied the baronet, with a smile; and for a time no more was said.

"Mine is a lonely life," said Sir Richard Harrington, again breaking the silence that prevailed; "and I feel more as if I were some hermit in his cave than the real master of a great house like mine. There is something ghostly and sad about Greystone Abbey, now that I am all alone there, and that there is nothing to brighten it, or my life. I was young, you see, Lady Egeria, to have the property and all its cares devolve on me."

"I can well understand that you must find it so," answered Lady Egeria, quite cordially. There had been a ring of truthfulness in his voice when he was speaking of

his own solitary state, just as there had been in Mavina's when bewailing the neglect of the man she loved, to which the noble daughter of the house of Fitzurse could not but meet with a sympathy that in one instance at least was mistaken. Her words were music to the ears of the young baronet, who was emboldened to say—

“Ah, if I could but hope one day to have the happiness of bringing home a bride I could really worship, and whose lover, whose slave, I should be proud through life to be, how different would my prospects seem—how would the happy future gild the grey monotony of the present!”

This was a romantic speech, but not, after all, a formal declaration, and therefore the marquess' daughter was able quietly to reply that probably Sir Richard, at his age and in his worldly position, need scarcely despair of happiness in life.

“Yes, but suppose I had set my hopes on one bright star, and all the rest seemed dross to me,” pleaded Sir Richard—“suppose dear, dearest Lady Egeria, if I may call you so——”

“You may not!” said Lady Egeria, haughtily, and drawing back from his side—“certainly not!”

“Ah!” said the young man, bitterly; “I know, or rather I feel, Lady Egeria, why you are so cruel and so cold. It was for my brother—for poor lost Lionel—that you did care, and that is why you repulse me when I would have you listen as I pour out my heart to you.”

“You have no right to speak thus to me,” indignantly replied Lady Egeria. “I have given you no such right, Sir Richard, and I must request, insist, that you will not repeat what you have presumed to say.”

“Pardon me, I will not so offend again,” was the rejoinder. “Only say that I am forgiven, and I will vex you no more.”

Sir Richard said these words admirably, and with a chivalric contrition and sadness in his voice and bearing that almost touched Lady Egeria's proud nature. She bent her head in assent.

“Let us forget all this, and be friends,” she said.

Neither of the two, absorbed in this conversation, had heard the rustling of branches near, or noted a pair of grey eyes watching them with a baleful expression from behind the screen of the rhododendrons close by.

“ I had better now leave you perhaps,” said the baronet, humbly.

“ Perhaps you would be so kind as to find Miss Malstock for me, as she is to be the companion of my homeward drive,” said Lady Egeria, “ and to tell one of the squire’s servants that I want my carriage and ponies, for it is time for me to go home ? ”

“ Very well, Lady Egeria ; to order the carriage and to hunt up Miss Malstock shall be my first duties,” answered Sir Richard, and he turned in the direction of the house.

There was no one, we may be sure, discernible among the rhododendron bushes as he passed them by, and, having executed that portion of Lady Egeria’s wishes which concerned the carriage, the baronet next went in quest of Miss Malstock, whom he found on the lawn, looking on at the performance of the tennis players.

Lady Egeria, when alone, murmured to herself. “ Yes, it was true. I refused to answer him ; but it was true ! O Lionel, my love, my love, on whom I had anchored my heart as woman seldom does, for whose sake I wear these emblems of mourning, whose memory is so dear to me—for your sake it is that I can never love your brother.”

A few minutes later, Lady Egeria, having bidden adieu to her hostess and the kindly squire, stepped into her dainty little equipage, with Mavina at her side, and returned Sir Richard’s parting bow. The spirited little ponies shook their flowing manes and rattled their silver-mounted harness as the carriage rolled off, and was speedily lost to sight.

It was growing late in the day, and by degrees the carriages of various sorts came round and the guests departed and presently the garden party at Old Court had come to an end, and was merely registered in the recollections of those who had been there as a pleasant memory of the past.

CHAPTER IX.

“SHALL EXPECT MY REWARD.”

A COMFORTABLE but ugly red-brick house, at the corner of Crown Street, which in Wortham is regarded as a most respectable locality, bore on its neatly-painted door a plate in burnished brass, indicating that it was the residence of Mr. T. Malstock, surgeon.

The doctor's gig, with a steady brown horse in the shafts, was standing at the door, and in the surgery were the doctor's two apprentices—or pupils if you will—one toiling at the pestle and mortar, while the other was labeling and tying up sundry phials, for their employer made up his own medicines. He was universally respected, though, and was so constantly hailed as Dr. Malstock that we may as well concede him brevet rank at once, since he was dubbed M.D. by all except himself.

Dr. Malstock, then, his wife, and his only daughter, Mavina, were together in the square, somewhat shabbily-furnished drawing-room on the left. The honest surgeon was drawing on his gloves before starting for a round of outlying visits. Mrs. Malstock, plump, round-faced, and lethargic, as great a contrast to her pretty daughter as need be, was busy with her needle. Mavina was still seated at the piano, with a piece of music before her. She had been singing. Her father liked to hear her fine voice render the plaintive, simple ballads, English and Scottish, that he prized above Italian bravura, and was often too tired in the evening to do anything but doze in his armchair; and the last notes of her song had but just died out in the sultry August air.

“Well done, my girl,” said the doctor, heartily. “Real taste, and real feeling, there, to my fancy. I must be off now, though, for there's a new patient waiting for me so far off as Glannersley Cross Roads, and I must push Brown Robin on at his best trot to make up for lost time. Good-bye, Kitty, dear. I shan't be in much before seven, at the earliest.”

A minute later, and off clattered the doctor's gig, while Mavina put away her music, closed her piano, and collected the three volumes of a novel that lay strewn in different parts of the room.

"I see you are going to the library," said placid Mrs. Malstock ; "and if so, I wish you would remember to bring me two skeins of that difficult blue worsted and four of the red. I can't get on with my fire-screen till I have them."

Mavina promised to bring back with her the coveted skeins, left the room, put on her hat and gloves and jacket, and was soon round the corner of Crown Street. Her first call was the now daily one at the post office.

As usual, there was no letter. At the library she exchanged her novel for one unread, and selected the Berlin wool that her mother required, but it was not until she had left that emporium of literature and fancy work that it suddenly occurred to her to pay a visit to Jasper Holt's office at the other end of Wortham, on the chance of his having news for her as to the lost Walter Travis

She was like many country-bred girls, very independent as to her outgoing and incoming, and knew that her prolonged absence would not cause anxiety at home.

On reaching Mr. Holt's office in Old Mill Lane, no attention was paid to the peal of the door bell. The maid of all work was probably out, and Mivers, the impish boy clerk, had been despatched on a genuine errand, while, as luck would have it, Jasper was himself absent.

Without hesitation, Miss Malstock turned the handle of the door, and let herself into the narrow passage, and after rapping at the inner door and eliciting no reply admitted herself to the lawyer's office, which she found empty, untidy, and strewn with dust and lumber, as she had anticipated.

She took the chair nearest to her, and prepared to wait. Now Mavina was of an impatient character, and it chafed her to remain inactive. For some moments she occupied herself with tracing lines and letters, with the point of her parasol, in the dust that lay thickly in neglected corners, and in restlessly rising to peer over the wire blinds, but presently she espied, dangling from the keyhole of Mr. Holt's official desk, a shining bunch of keys.

She pounced at it as promptly, and with as scanty scruple, as a cat pounces on an unwary mouse, and in an instant had lifted the lid of the ink-stained desk, lying within which, on a mass of bundles of papers tied with red tape, she beheld an open letter and an open telegram. She glanced first at the telegram. It ran thus :—

“Have made inquiries, per confidential agent, as requested by yourself.

“Have reason to fear foul play.

“Conjecture that the missing man has been made away with.

“Will, if desired, prosecute further inquiry.

“JAMES SCROGG,
“Bombay.”

The letter which next claimed Mavina's attention was couched in the following language :—

“DEAR SIR,—I agree to the terms proposed, although exorbitantly high. Of this I am well aware, but in such a case as this, money must be freely sacrificed. What was done in India was my misfortune, not my fault, as I explained to you ; but I do not wish it to be talked of, as it might be, even if unjustly, to my prejudice.

“I can only say, then, that I entrust the business to your hands, and hope soon to hear no more of it. I repeat that I am willing to pay the money demanded.

“Believe me to remain, dear sir,
“Your much obliged,
RICHARD HARRINGTON, BART.

“Greystone Abbey, August 5th.”

With flashing eyes, with frowning brow, and with her small white teeth peeping from between her red lips, like those of a tiger-cat about to spring, Mavina committed to memory the exact words of both documents. Small difficulty was there in that. It needed not intelligence as subtle as hers to perceive the connection between the English letter and the Indian telegram. The sound of a distant footfall on the pavement without caused her to remember the necessity for caution. In an instant she had reclosed the desk, had readjusted the letters and papers that littered it, had seated herself, and had resumed her occupation of tracing lines with her parasol in the dust.

Then she heard the street door opened, and a man came in with hurrying tread, and next the handle of the

door near her was turned, and a loud, hard voice exclaimed, "Hilloa, I beg pardon, Miss Malstock; sorry, I'm sure, to have kept *you* waiting, out of all the world. But sit down, sit down, my dear young lady. I have news for you to-day—news from India—but not, I'm afraid, exactly what you wish."

Mavina's powers of dissembling must have been considerable, so rapidly had she contrived to banish from her face and demeanor every trace of her recent excitement.

"News for me, Mr. Holt," she said, half eagerly, but with a tremulous voice; "not—not bad news, though, I hope?"

At this moment Jasper's quick eye caught sight of the keys dangling from the keyhole of his unlocked desk, and he could not suppress the homely exclamation of "Bless my soul!" uttered with some annoyance at his own carelessness. But he noted, too, that the objects covering the lid of the desk were precisely placed as he had left them, while the manner of his fair client was not such as to suggest the faintest suspicion of prying curiosity on her part.

"Don't blame me if it is so," replied the lawyer, as he opened his desk and took from it the telegram, which he proceeded to smooth out with his heavy hand.

"This message, Miss Malstock," Jasper went on to say, "is from a professional man, an English solicitor, established in Bombay, with whom I have had former intercourse. Mr. Scrogg has been in India twenty years, and knows the country and the native character as well as most men, so that I have little doubt but that the agents he employs are as able to worm out the truth as can be expected. Here is the telegram itself for you to read. He sent it, I daresay, immediately on receiving the report of his subordinates."

And the solicitor put into Mavina's hand the despatch from India, every word of which she knew by heart, though now it was incumbent on her to read it afresh, and to feign wonder, as well as horror, at the drift of it.

"Oh, Mr. Holt—how dreadful!" she said, sobbing; and as she let the telegram drop from between her fingers she averted her face and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Jasper gave her some rough words of comfort.

"Bad," he said, "as the business looked, it was possible that the poor fellow might be still alive; possible, too,

that the foul play hinted at might not have amounted to the worst and most heinous crimes. He would," he said, "telegraph back to India before he slept, and endeavor to elucidate the mystery."

He begged Miss Malstock to compose herself, and to hope for the best.

"You know the world so much better, Mr. Holt," she said, meekly, "than a poor weak girl like myself can do, that I feel I had better be guided by your advice, and permit myself to hope. Lady Egeria, too, I am sure, will attach weight to your opinion, for she has been kind enough to express much interest in the search for my sake."

"For your sake, there are others than Lady Egeria Fitzurse, dear Mavina," began the lawyer, taking one of his pretty client's hands between his own strong ones, but he had not time to complete the sentence, for Mavina, with quiet firmness, liberated her fingers from his grasp.

"Mr. Holt," she said, with offended dignity, "I have already signified to you, I believe, that I dislike these familiarities, and that I do not wish you to address me by my Christian name."

There was a look of undisguised admiration in Jasper's overbright eyes as he was thus admonished, for Mavina's indignation had raised a tinge of color in her fair, pale face, that he deemed remarkably becoming, while her fine eyes had lost their usual dreamy languor. However, he was quite urbane, and almost humble, as he replied—

"I beg your pardon, for the freedom, I am sure. But, really, Miss Malstock, it can be no secret to you that the one chief object of my life now is to win your hand—your dear little hand—and to be the happy husband of one who would make the very prettiest little wife in all Worthing. Do not, I beg of you, give me an answer now," he made haste to add, "as I see by your attitude that it would not be favorable to me, but think it over again. Think it over, and rely on my devotion and my constancy. I admired you long, long before I had the privilege of knowing you. This is not the first time, as you may remember, that I have pleaded to you to care a little for me—for me, who think of you so much among the cares of my life. I can only say that since I am doing my best for you—all I can, in short—if the sad news in this tele-

gram should prove to have a basis of truth, and your poor friend be lost to you for ever, you will then, I hope, allow me to come forward—you need not shake your pretty head, Mavina—well, Miss Mavina ; and remember that if I work for you as I am working now, it is to you that I shall look for my reward.”

A half-whispered word in answer—“I will think of it ; let me go now ”—and she was gone.

CHAPTER X.

LADY SPARKLETON'S SONG REMAINS UNFINISHED.

“WHAT are we to do now ? The dinner party for to-night complete—just fourteen of us—and now, at the last moment, Janet, your aunt, sends word that we are not to count on her. It is most provoking !”

And the Marquess of Cheviot, though as good humored a gentleman as ever lived, looked irritable as he tossed a crumpled, scented note upon the table hard by.

“Is Aunt Janet ill, or does she think so ?” asked Lady Egeria.

“Some rubbish she writes about neuraptics, the new nonsensical term for her old complaint of the nerves, which that prince of humbugs, old Sir Joseph Doublegee, taught her when she went up to London. Anyhow, she can't come—or she won't—and here we are, a party of thirteen, and the guests expected for half-past eight o'clock,” said the marquess.

“I think the only plan will be to ask Mavina—Miss Malstock,” suggested his daughter, after an instant for reflection. “We shall have, as it is, more gentlemen than ladies at the table. And Mavina will come at short notice, I am sure.”

The marquess made somewhat of a wry face at the mention of Miss Malstock.

“I am not so very pleased,” he said, “at the notion of asking that young lady here to a dinner like this—and to meet the Sparkletons, too ; but never mind. Yes, Egeria, you had better get your *protégée* over, and send a carriage for her, I suppose. It's one of the penalties one pays for

living in the country, and a thinly inhabited part of the country to boot."

And so it was settled. Aunt Janet, by her default, had procured an invitation, in hot haste, for Mavina Malstock to assist at what had been intended to be a most select and carefully-chosen party. Lady Janet was an old maid of quality, sister to the marquess, and to whom her brother had lent the Dower House, two miles off, and in which there was now no dowager to dwell. A flighty, fussy invalid, dividing her time between the grind of fashionable life and the palliation of her own semi-imaginary ailments, was Lady Janet Fitzurse. Her cue, just then, was to be a martyr to some fine new variety of her old nervous disorder, and she had sent word on the very afternoon of the dinner party that it was impossible for her to do anything but sip chloral and inhale ether, and lie wrapped in shawls at home. Luckily, there was Mavina Malstock, too anxious to please her aristocratic friend to resent the poor compliment of being invited as a topgap. And by half-past eight o'clock the last of the expected guests had alighted at Hurst Royal.

The gong sent its deep roar and clang through hall and corridor, awakening the echoes of the grand old house, and as it sounded, the double doors of the great drawing-room were thrown open, and the company, two and two, passed out, by a double file of richly-liveried servants, and into the large dining-room, blazing with lights and bright with flowers.

Portraits of by-gone warriors, courtiers, and beauties of the house of Fitzurse looked down from the walls, while there was a gorgeous display of gold and silver plate, some of which at least must have escaped the melting pot when the reigning earl of the period sacrificed his goblets and tankards and massive drinking cups, to raise a regiment for King Charles. And the heaped up hot-house fruit, and rare flowers in colored masses, and golden epergnes and candelabra, on the table itself, were pleasant to look upon, and gave promise of a dinner as faultless as the appointments, for the marquess, though he lived so much in the country and so little in town, was known to have attached to his service a *chef* of no mean gastronomic renown.

The marquess had led in Lady Sparkleton, not long

returned from London, and soon to leave the country house, that she detested as a den of dullness, for Cowes or Caithness, then for Como, and anon for Nice. For Lady Sparkleton was not merely a peeress and beautiful woman, but a bright, particular star of fashion as well—a shooting star, as such restless meteors are apt to be, and Lord Sparkleton had enough to do to keep pace with her, pay her bills, and gratify her whims.

There is very little to be said of his lordship, except that he was pink and florid and silent, and had, with his fair hair and arched eyebrows, an air of perpetual astonishment, perhaps at finding himself the husband of a fashionable beauty so constantly cited by the society papers as Lady Sparkleton.

That lady had a superb voice, as well as a fine face and figure, and knew its value. Sometimes she could be persuaded to exert her vocal powers for the delight of the company in which she found herself, especially, ill-natured people averred, if a Royal Highness or even a foreign ambassador were present ; and at other times she was distinctly the bird that could sing and would not be made to sing, whether by entreaty or remonstrance.

On this occasion she was in high good humor, and there was every reason to suppose that she would not be cruel when asked to exhibit her accomplishments. The party from Old Court were there ; the squire, his kind wife, the two charming Redmayne girls, and the handsome guardsman, their brother. So was Sir Richard Harrington. So were three young cavalry officers, Paget, Vere, and Vane, from the cavalry barracks at Coalport, all of them belonging to families with whom the marquess counted some sort of kindred. So was Mavina, in a maize-colored silk dress that she wore on grand occasions, and wearing sundry old ornaments that her mother had worn on her wedding day.

Lady Egeria, in the rich simplicity of her attire, white chambery gauze, almost concealing the shimmer of the cloth of silver transparent beneath, and with no ornaments but a spray and a necklace of large pearls, contrasted with Lady Sparkleton, whose elaborate toilet was a triumph of Worth's art, combining, as it did, colored satin and cobweb lace, cloth of gold, embroidery of floss silk, and buttercup velvet. Her jewels, famous at London parties,

and appraised by the *Diogenes* and the *Argus* at ever so many thousands, flashed back the light in gleams of many-tinted radiance.

The peeress was undeniably handsome, and had a showy complexion that scoffed at pearl powder and owed nothing to carmine; but her features, like her figure, did not possess the delicate yet stately loveliness of Egeria Fitzurse. In her heart of hearts, the professional beauty felt this herself.

"Lucky for some of us that her father chooses to bury her alive in the country, as he does;" thus ran Lady Sparkleton's thoughts, as she glanced at the faultless face of her entertainer's graceful daughter.

The dinner was as good as dinner could well be; the wines of choice vintages; and the conversation, if not, for lack of topics, quite up to the London standard, at any rate tolerably brisk. Even Lord Sparkleton warmed up a little, and was able to find something to say when his host broached the subject of coals and coal mines.

Lord Sparkleton, like other magnates of those parts, drew a great part of his very comfortable income from sources subterranean, and he was now a victim, like the marquess, to the machinations of a hostile league, that had been formed to harass the coal owners into submitting to terms dictated by the men.

Silverseam, on the Cheviot property, was not the only pit that had been selected for an experimental strike. A mine of Lord Sparkleton's, known by the euphonious name of "Old Deepbiggin," had been similarly put under the ban of the Consolidated Colliers' Association, while subscriptions from the other miners in the district flowed merrily in to induce those on strike to regard their "play" as a genuine holiday.

"Trying, by Jove, to starve us all into surrender!" remarked Lord Sparkleton, growing perceptibly pinker.

"A shameful conspiracy, I call it!" said the marquess, in a raised voice, and there was a murmur of well-bred assent amongst the company.

If dinners, nowadays, are unreasonably late, at least men do not linger around the mahogany as did our ancestors of the hard-drinking Georgian reigns. And presently the whole of the guests were congregated in the great drawing-room, where Lady Sparkleton, who never condescended

to sing anything in her native tongue, graciously warbled a little Neapolitan ditty—boat song, or love song—much as a thrush endowed with human vocalization might have done. It was half promised that she would charm her listeners, later, with one of her best operatic performances. Then Alice Redmayne, who was a skilled pianiste, played something ; and next Mavina, being invited to sing, sang something, and was wrathful with herself that she felt too timid, in the presence of the titled London beauty, to do justice to her own powers. Often had she done far better with no audience but her parents, in the untidy drawing-room of her Crown Street home. The coffee trays and the ices were handed round, and there was a buzz of conversation until, after awhile, it came to be time for Lady Sparkleton's best song.

Round the piano were clustered the young cavalry officers, the Redmayne girls, and their brother, the guardsman, the latter of whom was proud to be permitted to adjust Lady Sparkleton's music for her as she took her seat. A little way off was Lady Egeria, to whom Lord Sparkleton was relating some episode of the season in town. The marquess and the squire were talking of matters magisterial in the doorway. Mavina, who was not on very intimate terms with any one there, save her patroness, and who felt awkward in consequence, stood examining a collection of photographs that lay on the table at some distance.

Some impulse of idle good nature or curiosity prompted Sir Richard Harrington to approach the girl, to whom he seldom had addressed a word, and to talk to her concerning the photographs—an easy subject.

"I have seen most of these places, Miss Malstock," he said, smiling. "Yes, there are the old Pyramids, the Caves of Elephanta, the Taj Mahul ; and here, I think—" By this time Lady Sparkleton had begun to sing, and her rich voice rang out with theatrical force and fulness, so that Sir Richard lowered his to a whisper—"is the Roshunee Mosque at Lahore, which——"

As he spoke he pointed to one of the photographs, in which a renowned Moslem shrine was depicted by no less an artist than Sol himself. But Mavina started as if a snake had bitten her. It was not the photograph on which her eyes were fixed. It was a ring on Sir Richard's finger

—a large ring, adorned by three fine rubies, on which her eyes had fastened. She pointed to it abruptly, and in a hoarse tone inquired—

“Where—where, Sir Richard, did you get that—that ring?”

The baronet's fair face blushed to a deathlike whiteness. His very lips paled, and his eyes grew dim, while he caught at the table as for support; but he rallied his faculties, and with a low, uneasy laugh, replied—

“Yes, there are painful memories connected with this ring, Miss Malstock. It belonged to a friend—a chum I had in India—he died——”

“I knew it—I knew it!” hissed out Mavina, with ghastly face and eyes dilated in horror, as she shrank back from him.

Nothing of this had been noticed by the other occupants of the drawing-room, intent on listening to Lady Sparkleton's sonata. The song itself had arrived at one of its most thrilling passages, when a shrill shriek made every one start and turn simultaneously. What was seen was Mavina dropping down in a swoon, and Sir Richard Harrington, who had caught her in his strong arms, just in time to prevent her from actually falling, supporting her drooping head and helpless form, while he himself looked strangely ill and agitated. The singer's voice died away in a quaver. The song was forgotten. All was confusion. The guests clustered hastily round, with proffers of help, and exclamations of wonder or of sympathy.

“Poor thing, we had better take her upstairs to my room—the blue morning room—she will recover more quickly there,” said Lady Egeria, and then led the way, while Harry Redmayne and one of the young cavalry officers aided Mavina, still half insensible, and with closed eyes and haggard mien, to ascend, slowly, the grand staircase.

The blue boudoir once reached, Louise, like a ministering sprite, appeared instantly in response to Lady Egeria's bell.

“Ah!” said the French maid. “I see what do—the young lady soon get well under my care. I have seen good many cases like hers, miladi, when I was in Paris.”

And she took immediate possession of the patient, laid her on a couch, opened the nearest window, and bustled

off in search of the regular remedies for syncope, and was soon back again.

“ We had better go, I think,” said Harry Redmayne, as Lady Egeria thanked the two gentlemen for their assistance, and he and the young hussar went back to report that the invalid was in experienced hands, and pronounced convalescent.

The marquess’ brougham was ordered round to Mavina’s home, since, as soon as she was able to speak, she declined to appear again in public that evening, and her patroness left her under the care of Louise. But before Lady Egeria gained the drawing-room, another of the guests had disappeared.

It was remembered afterwards that the groom of the chamber had brought in a letter and tendered it to Sir Richard, that the baronet had turned even whiter than before, if possible, as he took the letter from the salver on which it lay and noted its postmark and the handwriting, and that, with a wild glance around him, he had slipped out of the room, ordered his carriage, and departed, without a word to any one. So soon as the hostess returned there was a general dispersal. A gloom had fallen over the pleasant party. It was as though the shadow of misfortunes to come had darkened the festive scene. Of course, conventional words were uttered.

“ So sad for you, Lady Egeria.” “ Heat of the weather.” “ Thunder in the air.” “ So charming an evening.”

But the party broke up earlier than had been expected, and Lady Sparkleton’s best song remained unfinished.

CHAPTER XI.

BLACK WATER TARN.

THE Right Hon. Stephen Babbington, M.P., as hard-headed and sound a politician as any Parliamentary champion of the party to which the marquess belonged, had, with his wife and daughter, arrived at Hurst Royal. Theirs was to be a hurried visit. Two days or three were all that they could spare, on their way to Scotland ; but for one of these an excursion had been planned, that should include

Black Water Tarn, deservedly deemed the lion of the district. The weather, serene and warm, lent itself to such an expedition, and even Lady Janet, who was proud of her intimacy with a great man constantly mentioned in the most serious of leading articles, got well enough to join the party. The other seats in the yellow barouche were occupied by the M.P. and his anxious-eyed wife, and by the marquess himself. Lady Egeria went, as usual, in her basket carriage, escorted by the three liveried infants, and accompanied by Flora Babbington, a fine specimen of a particular style of the fashionable London young lady. The marquess had invited Harry Redmayne and Sir Richard to join his party at the Tarn.

“We’ll vote it a picnic on a small scale,” had been Lord Cheviot’s written words, in accordance with which a light cart, with luncheon and champagne and fruit, and a couple of servants, had been sent up in advance to the foot of the mountain. There was not a very sustained conversation kept up either in the barouche or the pony carriage. Lady Janet, whose beady, restless eyes, carefully-blackened eyebrows, and quaint little wrinkled face, gave her an odd resemblance to an elderly monkey in costly array, did indeed babble incessantly, not of green fields, but of London parties, rumors and scandals, social and political, but the marquess and the Right Hon. Stephen were not loquacious, while Mrs. Babbington, as usual, seemed weary and preoccupied. Lady Egeria and her fair guest were not exactly kindred spirits. Some remark on the part of the former, as to the wild beauty of the landscape, as the cream-colored ponies pressed on up the hilly road, elicited from Miss Babbington the following rejoinder—

“Yes, awfully pretty, and all that kind of thing, I’m sure ; but so lonely. The only thing I care for, out of town, is a good grass country, like Leicestershire ; that is fine ; but I forgot, Lady Egeria, you don’t hunt, I believe ?”

Lady Egeria did not hunt, whereas Flora Babbington, a feminine Nimrod of the first water, was famous for her cross-country feats, and quite a celebrity in the metropolitan shire of fox hunting.

The trysting place at the foot of the hill once reached, the carriages could go no further. The young baronet and the guardsman, it was agreed, should escort Lady Egeria

and Miss Babbington up the steep path leading to the Tarn itself, while the four elders of the party, with the luncheon and servants, the grooms and saddle horses, awaited them below. Flora Babbington eagerly accepted Harry Redmayne's arm for the ascent, thankful, as she afterwards said, to have found one who belonged to her own Belgravian world among the savage surroundings of this northern loch. Even her prattle was hushed, however, when first the magnificent view of the lakelet, overshadowed by grim crags, and lying among rocks and feathery willows, like a clear green gem in a rough setting, became visible. Black Water Tarn, small as it was, nevertheless looked strangely pretty and solitary amidst the bold limestone precipices that hemmed it in on three sides. Neither Sir Richard nor Lady Egeria had ever visited the spot, and they both gazed at the prospect silently for awhile, after Miss Babbington and her cavalier had rambled off among the rocks.

"I think," said the baronet, after a pause, "that I see an island in the Tarn, though how approachable, since there seems neither boat nor causeway, I cannot guess."

Lady Egeria was better informed. She had heard, she said, of a line of stepping stones on the north side of the Tarn, by which easy access to the islet might be attained. And she readily allowed herself to be persuaded, under Sir Richard's guidance, to walk round to where the stones were to be seen, showing their mossy surfaces above the shallow water, and to traverse the slippery path which they afforded, and gain the islet, which was overgrown with alder bushes and dwarf willows, and full of rocks. There were clouds already gathering, and a copper-colored haze dimmed the serene blue of the sky ; but the pilgrims were slow to note these signs of a coming storm, so much were they taken up in gazing at the rugged beauty of the scenery.

"There is a legend concerning this place," said Lady Egeria, consulting her memory, "that every century—or fifty years, perhaps—a black torrent pours down from the heights into the Tarn here, the water of which, as you see, is quite clear and pure, and rushes, doing mischief as it goes, down into the lower valleys—a torrent as black as ink, perhaps stained by the peat that is so plentiful on the high moors."

Sir Richard smiled as he looked into the Tarn below,

crystal clear and smooth as a mirror, when suddenly Lady Egeria started, and pointed upwards, exclaiming, in half-frightened accents—

“Look—Sir Richard—look, by the cliff-top yonder!”

The baronet glanced upwards. Down the white limestone something black as ink was slowly trickling. But before he had time to comment on the singularity of the coincidence, there was a blinding flash of lightning, and then a startling crash of thunder that awoke the sullen echoes of the hills, and down came the rain with almost tropical violence. “There is no time to be lost,” began Sir Richard, when with a shudder Lady Egeria, who had never turned her face from the cliff wall, interrupted his speech.

“Indeed not!” she exclaimed; “this is no common storm. See—see where it comes!”

For already the trickling thread of sable fluid had changed into a roaring cascade of turbid water, bursting over the edge of the precipice, and flinging itself into the Tarn below. The sky was veiled now; it was almost dark; and the lurid gleams of the lightning were near and frequent, while crash after crash, peal after peal, rang with thunderous noise from crag to cave, and as deafening grew the hoarse roar of the angry black torrent rushing from above. To traverse the stepping stones, now deeply submerged, would have been hopeless, while already the low-lying banks of the islet were inundated, and it was difficult for Sir Richard to find a partial shelter for Lady Egeria, amidst the heavy rain and the rising water, amidst the trees and rocks of the higher ground.

“What is to be done?” said the young man, almost with a groan of despair; “how can I save you—at any cost? I am a strong swimmer, and perhaps——”

“It would be impossible,” gently answered Lady Egeria; “nor can we remain here much longer unharmed. But I think I saw an old boat chained to a post as we came round towards the stones, and if you could unfasten it, Sir Richard, there might yet be a chance of safety.”

“A boat! Stay where you are, then, Lady Egeria, for a moment, and hold on by the bough of this tough alder tree if the flood rises,” answered the baronet, excitedly; “I will not be long away, at any hazard to myself.”

But it was not until several anxious moments had gone

by that Sir Richard came hurrying back through the inundation, already knee deep.

“ This way—this way, Lady Egeria—” he gasped out, as he seized her wrist. “ I have left the boat fast to a willow, but we must hasten, or the very tree will be torn from its roots. Let me help you—thus.”

Through the driving rain, through the blinding glare of the lightning, they pressed on. Lady Egeria could scarcely keep her feet, so strong was the rush of the foaming water that surged and heaved, a sable sea, all around them. Sir Richard’s powerful arm sustained her as she crossed the lower part of the islet, and once, as they approached the almost sunken willow to which the boat was tied, he had to lift her shrinking form to effect a passage across the swampy earth.

The boat at last ! a fisher’s boat, old and rickety, but with oars and a boathook lying by the thwarts. In a moment Lady Egeria was lifted in, and in the next Sir Richard had cast off the moorings, had sprung in, and, grasping the oars, set forth on his perilous voyage. Three times, dashed against rocks or trees, it seemed as if the reeling skiff must be upset or stove in, and as it was, the water burst over the gunwale and trickled in through more than one seam or crevice.

The storm raged on. The boat was old and frail. Had not the young master of Greystone been a skilled oarsman, as well as a strong man, nerved to do his best in that hour of danger, there would have been small hope of safety. Once, twice, as the clumsy craft heeled over under the violence of the black waves, Lady Egeria’s marble-white face and clasped hands were more eloquent than words, and death seemed certain. But with rare courage and dexterity Sir Richard fought his way through the surging waste of waters, and at last the shore was gained, and he was able to force the boat into a natural creek, and to help Lady Egeria, wet, chilled, and weary, to gain the stony bank, and scramble beyond the reach of the sullen waves that broke hoarsely among the rugged boulders.

The short-lived mountain storm was dying out in distance, and already the heavy rain had diminished, and the thunder rolls were less frequent, but no path or track was visible, and the two had to make their way as best they might, amidst rocks and bushes and loose pebbles, down

the steep slope that led from the elevated plateau to the lower level beneath. To the right, a deep low roar told where the sable torrent, overflowing from the Tarn, was forcing its way towards the lowlands. There was no immediate peril, but Lady Egeria, clinging to the arm of her rescuer, could scarcely keep her feet on the wet and broken ground which had to be traversed. Thoroughly exhausted, drenched with wet, and bewildered by the glare of the lightning, they struggled on, and at last emerged from amidst the white rocks into a more open space.

“That must be the road,” exclaimed the baronet, in a tone of relief; “and there, Lady Egeria, are the carriages, or I am much mistaken. Courage, then, for a minute more.”

The lost ones were welcomed, almost as if risen from the dead, when, a minute later, they found themselves among their friends. The marquess, in especial, who had been half-distracted at the idea of his daughter’s danger, was overjoyed now to welcome her back, and wrung Sir Richard’s hand with a heartiness which showed that his gratitude was genuine. Harry Redmayne and Miss Babbington had regained the high road and the party long ago, but they had brought no news with them except a doleful report of the inundation, and since then two of the servants had been despatched to the nearest farms to summon aid. This soon arrived, in the shape of men and ropes, but, fortunately, those who had been mourned as lost were already in security.

There was no question, then, of luncheon, as may well be guessed. To hurry home was all that could be thought of. Lady Egeria, cold and wet as she was, declined to take a seat in the barouche. With Miss Babbington beside her, she took her usual place in the low pony carriage, and as Sir Richard took her hand to say “adieu” she looked at him more kindly than ever before as she whispered—

“I owe you my life. You saved me, bravely, nobly, at cruel peril to yourself, and I shall never forget it—to my dying day.”

One lingering pressure of her hand, and then the four mettled ponies sprang forward on their homeward route to Hurst Royal, the other carriage following promptly, while Sir Richard and young Redmayne remounted their horses,

and set off towards their respective homes. None of those who composed the party would be likely to forget that eventful visit to Black Water Tarn.

CHAPTER XII.

“LET US BE FRIENDS.”

It was the morning of the day succeeding to that which had witnessed the eventful excursion to Black Water Tarn. As usual in our climate, the thunderstorm had proved the herald of a change in the weather, lately so fine. Much rain had fallen, and the lowering look of the leaden-tinted clouds threatened a fresh deluge, but now there were fitful gleams of sunshine, profiting by which Sir Richard Harrington ordered his horse to be saddled, and rode over to Hurst Royal. The baronet, as the groom who followed him had reason to know, was a fast rider, and habitually dashed along over hill and dale, “like Dick Turpin, or some one of that sort,” according to the verdict of the stable yard at Greystone Abbey.

On this occasion, however, his pace was demure enough to satisfy the most censorious of servile critics, and he let the reins hang loose on Wildfire’s neck, and rode thoughtfully and slowly along. As he expected, on reaching Hurst Royal, he was informed that the marquess was from home. There was, indeed, a magistrates’ meeting on that day at which Sir Richard, newly-appointed a Justice of the Peace, might, had he chosen, been present, and over which Lord Cheviot had to preside. The Right Hon. Stephen Babbington and his family had, soon after breakfast, resumed their journey towards the Scottish Highlands, and Lady Egeria was alone.

Sir Richard Harrington had so timed his visit as to find Lady Egeria alone, if possible. It was early in the day; too early, according to social etiquette, for ceremonious calls: but the young Lord of Greystone was already intimate at Hurst Royal; and, besides, nothing was more natural than that he should inquire concerning Lady Egeria’s health after the awkward adventure of yesterday.

He was ushered into the little green drawing-room, open-

ing into the spacious conservatory, the room in which Mavina habitually waited until her noble friend was at leisure to see her.

And presently, looking more beautiful than ever, Lady Egeria appeared, and came forward, with both her hands held out to him in greeting.

"I am so glad to thank you!" she said, eagerly; "to thank you, Sir Richard, better than I could do before, for what I owe you—my poor life. But for your courage and your kindness I should not be here to-day."

"It was nothing—nothing to mention," replied the baronet, reddening, for he winced under praise, even from lips so lovely. "Any one, in my place, Lady Egeria, would have done as much; or tried to do it."

"You are a true knight!" answered Lady Egeria, smiling, "and make little of dragon and paynim after you have conquered them. I shall not readily forget the flood of yesterday, nor our voyage, nor my debt of gratitude. Papa, too, with whom you have been a favorite from the first, could scarcely find words to express what he felt, now that you have proved yourself so true and brave a friend."

"Ah! that I might claim a dearer title," passionately responded the young man, fixing his eyes imploringly on the beautiful face of her whose life he had saved. "My wish, my longing, is to be regarded as something else than a friend: as your true lover, your devoted slave: one day, I trust, your proud and happy husband. Dear, dearest Egeria, hear me out. Do not turn your head away. Listen, while I plead for what I most value here on earth, for the one bright hope that gilds my solitary pathway in life—the hope of your love, your regard—that I may one day bring to Greystone the loveliest bride that ever crossed the threshold of the house of my father."

Lady Egeria's smile had died away, and with it the color had forsaken her cheek, and her beautiful face looked marble white as she slowly made answer—

"Sir Richard, I am sorry—sorry for this, which I did not foresee, or dream of. Yes, I am sorry, for both our sakes. For yours, because it cannot be as you desire. For mine, because I am grateful to you, and like you, and think highly of you, and so it hurts me to give you pain by a refusal. And yet I must refuse."

“Are you so cold, then—a very icicle—that no love, no constancy, can warm or win?” burst out the master of Greystone, reproachfully; “or can it be that I speak too late, and that your heart is given already to another?”

“You have no right, Sir Richard, to ask me such a question,” replied the beautiful girl, turning towards him with a queenly dignity and grace that enhanced her charms, “but I will answer it, notwithstanding. You have guessed wrongly. I am plighted to no one, love no one, amongst the living. But do not,” she made haste to add, as she saw a sudden brightness, as of hope, in his eyes, now riveted on hers, “do not be misled by my words. I must decline your proposal, sincere as I know it to be, and grieved as I am to seem cruel in what I say. I have no wish, no thought of marrying. What I reply to you would be my answer to any one who might pay me the compliment which you have just done.”

“Perhaps when you have known me better and longer,” persisted the suitor, clasping his hands together, and drawing a little nearer as he spoke; but Lady Egeria quietly but firmly interrupted him—

“No, no, Sir Richard Harrington,” she said; “you must cherish no such fancy. That you may be happy, I hope, and that you may one day bring home to Greystone Abbey a wife worthy of you. But her name will not be Egeria Fitzurse. My answer, I must beg you to believe, is a final and fixed one.”

The baronet could hardly repress a sob as he pressed his hands upon his throbbing temples.

“You little know,” he said, bitterly, “how like a death knell to my dreams of earthly happiness are your cold words. I came here—fool that I was—with hope in my heart. All things seem very dreary, barren and forsaken, now that I have spoken and got my answer. My lonely home, the solitude of which falls on me from day to day, will seem lonelier than ever now. I feel myself a broken man, with no care for the position I have inherited, or the career that seemed to lie before me. I wish, now, that I had not sent in my papers, and left the army. But, to be sure, I can leave England. To live on here, and be denied your affection, and banished from your presence, would be insupportable to me.”

“But why should you be so banished?” responded

Lady Egeria, pityingly, almost tenderly. "Why should we not be friends, fast friends—you and I—because we cannot be to each other more than that? Stay here in your own home, Sir Richard, among those who esteem and value you, among whom my father and myself may, I trust, be always reckoned, and with time you will get over this—fancy."

"It is a fancy that will last a lifetime," answered the young man, and looking very handsome and proud and sad as he said it. "But I will take your advice, Lady Egeria, and will form no immediate resolution as to my future plans. I felt, at the first, as if I could know no rest until the sea rolled between us two. But if I may still be admitted at Hurst Royal——"

"Not merely admitted, but welcomed here, as a dear and tried friend and neighbor," said Lady Egeria, smiling again. "We shall see you very often, I hope, and gradually you will come to look on me with other eyes, and we shall forget this."

"I shall never forget," answered Sir Richard, as he rose from his seat; "but I will do your bidding, cruel beauty. Yes, I will stay in England for the present, and at Grey-stone if I can. I shall not offend again, if my presumption is to be pardoned, and I am not to be shut out from the house that contains all I prize and value in this world. I shall not plead my cause again, nor even dare to hope that time may soften you towards me, but I shall remain in the neighborhood, and shall have the happiness of seeing you from time to time, Lady Egeria, as you say."

"Yes, and we shall be friends, ever and always," said Lady Egeria, tears glistening in her eyes as she took his offered hand at parting.

"Yes, let us be friends," he said, mournfully, as he grasped her hand and raised it hurriedly to his lips. Then he rushed from the room, and very soon the quick beat of his horse's hoofs was heard on the crisp gravel without, as he struck his spurs into Wildfire's flanks, and rode at furious speed down the grand avenue of the park, until at last the sounds were lost in distance.

CHAPTER XIII.

SIR RICHARD DROPS HIS MASK.

IT was still summer, but a mellow haze had tempered the dazzling blue of the sky ; the flowers had lost the early freshness of their gloom ; the ripening fruit on orchard bough and sunny peach wall gave silent warning that autumn was at hand. Indifferent, however, to the slow but certain progress of the seasons was the young master of Greystone. He was in his library, the room in which, though far from being of studious habits, he spent, when within doors, most of his time. A fine room, that library. It had been the abbot's parlor before Greystone and its lands had passed into the possession of a lay owner ; and its tapestried walls, and faded gilding, and carved beams and cornices of oak, as smooth and black as polished ebony, remained as mementoes of the past. The furniture, of course, was of a different date, and so were the books. There were windows of stained glass, glorious with those inimitable hues of blue and crimson that modern skill strives so hard to reproduce, and through which the daylight fell in many-colored patches on the Turkey carpet. Sir Richard Harrington could well remember, of course, that this had been his father's favorite room, in which he received steward and tenants, wrote letters, and transacted such magisterial business as can be discharged single-handed by a Justice of the Peace.

The present owner of the abbey was pacing to and fro with hurried strides, and a cloud upon his brow, deep in thought.

" I'll not give in ! " he muttered, with a dogged resolve that lent an expression almost of grimness to his fair face. " Never think it, my Lady Egeria, were you twice as haughty, twice as cold, twice the beautiful iceberg that you seem to be. I was never really baffled yet when I had set my heart upon a thing. Yes, you refused me yesterday,

and prudence counseled that after my rejection as a suitor I should assume the humbler position of a friend. But the day may come—yes, the day may come—when some instinct of feminine weakness, a feminine caprice, may make you lend a willing ear to vows that—Aha! I forgot!” he abruptly exclaimed, pausing in his walk, and actually in his vexation striking his forehead with his clenched hand. “Fool that I was! I have never given a thought to yonder accursed letter, or the writer of it, since it was thrust into my hand the other night. So much since then has happened to distract my mind from the wretched scrawl that seemed as ominous when I espied it as the hand-writing on the wall of Belshazzar’s banquet room.”

He then took from his pocket a key, of peculiar shape and elaborate construction, and with it unlocked one of the drawers of an antique cabinet, inlaid with ivory and ormolu, which stood in a corner of the room. It was a deep drawer, and when opened proved to contain miscellaneous objects: a few trinkets, for instance, a clasped pocket book, a revolver, a good deal of loose money, in gold, silver, and crumpled bank notes, a bunch of faded flowers, and two or three letters. One of these, the seal of which was yet unbroken, was the missive which, marked “urgent and immediate,” had been sent over from Greystone to Hurst Royal and proffered to Sir Richard during Mavina Malstock’s fainting fit and the confusion which it created after the dinner party at which Lady Sparkleton had been present. The baronet vaguely remembered, now, that he had thrust the unopened letter, on his return home, into its present receptacle. Some time had elapsed since then, and still the document had remained in its hiding place, like a sleeping snake, unread and unanswered.

Sir Richard scowled at it as he turned it over again and again, hesitating, as it seemed, to peruse it. The paper was smooth and of fine quality; the seal a quaint monogram; the handwriting decidedly feminine, and the ink violet. A strong odor of some perfume, only too well remembered, clung to this letter like an atmosphere, and lent to it a sort of individuality that marked it off from ordinary correspondence. Setting his teeth firm, and with a visible repugnance, Sir Richard tore open the envelope, took forth the letter, unfolded it, and flinging himself into

the arm chair that stood nearest, began to read. What he read ran thus:—

“On my return from the hills to Futtehpoore, I heard what had occurred. You were gone—gone. You had left India—left me—without a word of farewell. But you are very much mistaken if you think I am so easily to be deserted. When you were poor, the mere cadet of a grand family, without a chance of the title and estates, were you not then my ardent lover, ready to pour out vows of devotion at my feet, pledged to be mine, and to share the wealth that was freely offered you?

“And now how is it now? I counsel you, in your new prosperity, to remember Zenobia, and to recollect that the blood in my veins is, in part at least, the warm blood of an Oriental, passionate alike for good or ill. Think of me—call up my image in the mirror of your memory. Can you not believe that my vengeance, once aroused, could be as pitiless as my fondness was tender?

“Beware, Sir Richard Harrington! I am not to be slighted, or neglected, with safety to him who dares to trifle with a heart like mine. I know your secret. I know the search that has been made for the body of the missing man. I know that—and more. Gold has placed at my command eyes and ears that serve me faithfully and well, and what is hidden can be revealed, if I am driven to use my power to the uttermost. I repeat that, in India even more than elsewhere, gold is a talisman that can unlock all tongues, unravel all mysteries, and that he alone who has no blame on his conscience is proof against what it can effect.

“You are in my power, Sir Richard. By a word I could bring you down from your place of worldly honor; by a word I could bring you to disgrace and ruin and punishment. But will you have it so—will you forget your promises and your plight, and force me to be a foe indeed? I hope not. But you must make up your mind soon—very soon. The mail steamer which conveys this letter also brings me to England. I shall be in London when you receive it. Write to me there, under cover, to my bankers, Messrs. Grindley and Cross, of Lombard Street, and let me know whether you choose to be friend or enemy to

“ZENOBIA STONE.”

Twice, thrice, and yet for a fourth time did the baronet peruse this letter, as if to extract some crumb of comfort from amidst its veiled menaces and imperious demands; and then, with a groan, he let it drop from his fingers, while his face grew haggard and worn. It was as if twenty years had suddenly been added to his age, so great was the change that agitation had worked.

“I am lost,” he muttered, hoarsely; “yes, lost. I would sooner have had a score of men for my enemies than hear that yonder she-fiend, subtle, daring and unscrupulous, is

on my track. On my track, indeed, as a bloodhound might be, ruthless and keen of scent, never to rest till the prey be hunted down. Yes, it must be so, I suppose. Would that I had never seen that dark face of hers ! All will be dragged into the light of day, and I, young as I am, I, Richard Harrington, become a doomed and disgraced man. One hope, and one alone, remains."

He rose from his chair, seated himself at the writing table, and with trembling fingers seized a pen. The letter which he wrote was short and hurried, and the writer's hand shook so much that the lines were crooked and the characters barely legible. That hand had been steady enough when grasping a rifle in the dangerous pursuit of large game among the hills and forests of India, and had very recently given rare proof of its owner's coolness and courage when rescuing Lady Egeria from imminent risk on Black Water Tarn. It shook, now, like an aspen leaf ; but, somehow, the letter was dashed off, signed, sealed, and directed.

"It was my only chance !" muttered Sir Richard, with a sigh of regret, as he satisfied himself that the address was full and accurate. "To have defied her, would have been madness. It is better thus."

He glanced at the ornamental clock upon the massive chimney-piece of black marble. In half an hour it would be time for the regular despatch of the post bag. The letter, however, which the master of Greystone had just penned seemed to him too important by far to be entrusted to any hands but his own. This time the baronet ordered no horse to be saddled. Leaving the house on foot, he traversed the long avenue, under the shadow of the great elms, his hat pulled down over his brows, his eyes down-cast, and scarcely noted the respectful salutation of his own lodgekeeper, or the hat touchings and deferential ducks of the head of such underlings, woodmen, or laborers from the home farm as he encountered beyond the precincts of the park.

"Summat wrong wi' the young master !" was the comment most frequent that evening on the benches of the village ale house, and to this was frequently added the saving clause : "Yet it be a main pity, too !"

Sir Richard was personally popular with the few humble neighbors or hangers on of the estate with whom during

his short tenure he had had any direct intercourse ; and then is it not in human nature to be hopeful and indulgent at the beginning of a new reign ? That pecuniary embarrassment should annoy him seemed impossible.

The Harrington estates, it was well known, were as unencumbered as the lands of the Marquess of Cheviot himself, whereas Lord Sparkleton, and Squire Redmayne, of Old Court, and most of the county magnates adjacent, were equally well known to suffer more or less for the extravagance of their progenitors. And that so handsome a young fellow should be crossed in love appeared to the rustic judgment almost unnatural.

Yet a screw loose of some sort there evidently was. Meanwhile Sir Richard himself recked little of the opinions which his moody looks and dejected demeanor might elicit. He reached Wortham, sought out the post-office, slipped into the box the letter which he had written, and returned without having exchanged a word with any one.

A few weeks after these events, Mrs. Redmayne and her two daughters were together in the drawing room at Old Court, waiting, so it seemed, for six o'clock and the arrival of the tea equipage.

The squire was far afield, amidst crofts and copses, with his dogs and his gun. He was an old-fashioned man, who cared not for the modern luxury of afternoon tea, and who did care a good deal for the somewhat obsolete diversion of partridge shooting, in which he could not induce his son Harry to take an interest.

The guardsman was away, too, at the house of some friend, whose notions of sport coincided with his own, and where battues and driver, beginning with the grouse and ending with the pheasants, superseded that homely "all-round" warfare against fur and feathers with which the present proprietor of Old Court was content.

Mrs. Redmayne had spent the uneventful day within doors. But the girls, who had been out in their pony carriage, had been over to Wortham, and were now eager and talkative over the local gossip they had picked up.

Did mamma know that the Towers at Saxham had been let ? Could mamma guess who or what was the new tenant ? Such first-rate fun ! Such a chance for the county !

"I think, girls," said placid Mrs. Redmayne, with her good-natured smile, "that if you took it by turns to speak, I should have a better chance of learning the news of which you are evidently both so full."

The young ladies laughed, and Clara it was who took the lead.

"In the first place, mamma, it is quite certain that the Towers is taken. Horses, carriages, servants, all arrived. And now our new neighbor is there herself."

Mrs. Redmayne pricked up her ears, for Saxham Towers was a grand old house, the absentee owner of which had never yet succeeded in finding a tenant to pay him rent for the mansion that he could not afford to inhabit.

"Our new neighbor, as you call her, is tolerably rich, I should presume," said the mistress of Old Court.

"Enormously rich, and a princess!" excitedly returned Maud. Visions of a German Serene Highness floated before Mrs. Redmayne's mental vision, but she shook her head as she considered the improbability of such an advent.

"There are oceans of money, I believe," interjected the calmer Clara; "but I don't know about her being a princess, though they do call her the Begum. And they say she has brought down five carriages with her, though that, I suspect, is a mistake."

"But the Oriental servants are not a mistake. Only think, mamma, real Eastern natives of some sort, with turbans and scarfs and muslin, here in our Border county; and then the jewels. They say there are rubies and diamonds and pearls on her toilette table fit to show in some exhibition. She must be a princess; and then she dresses so splendidly and looks so well," burst out Madge, as Maud was generally styled at home.

Mrs. Redmayne arched her eyebrows. "All this," she said, "sounds like a page from the 'Arabian Knights,' with the turbans and jewels, and, perhaps, black slaves carrying golden trays. But you have not told me who this wonderful person is?"

"Nobody seems exactly to know," responded Clara; "but only think of the parties she is sure to give!"

"If only to show off her jewels!" added Madge.

"And her face!" continued the elder sister; "since all agree that she is so very, very handsome—dark, of course."

“Cleopatra in the nineteenth century!” observed the mistress of Old Court, who was fonder of books than were her bright-eyed daughters, and probably knew something more of the Greek Queen of Egypt than her bare name; “but you forget, my dears, that Cleopatra may have come here for the sake of quiet. That, in an English country neighborhood, can generally be had.”

The girls, for a moment, looked blank. Their imaginations had run riot as to the *fêtes* to be expected at the Towers, which was really among the finest houses in the North of England, and belonged to a broken-down baronet, who was understood to vegetate in a shabby Paris *entresol*, but whose ancestors of the Georgian reign had kept up an over-bounteous hospitality under that now abandoned roof tree. But they were too young and too sanguine to disbelieve what they desired to come true.

“Come, come, mamma,” said Miss Redmayne, “people don’t bring down fine carriages and a troop of servants, and dress gorgeously, and parade their jewels just to mope in solitude. I’ve heard that Saxham Towers was a pleasant house enough once upon a time, and so it may be once more under the new rule.”

It was Mrs. Redmayne’s turn to laugh.

“There is another side to the picture,” she said, sagely. “Your Begum, or whatever you call her, must be rich, and may desire to spend some of her money on entertainments, but, even then, the question arises, where in these regions are the guests to come from? She may be anybody. If no one knows her, she will not be visited. Her very name, as far as I can gather from what you tell me, seems almost as much a mystery as her antecedents. When first you told me that the Towers had a new tenant, I fancied that it had been taken by some Manchester man, just as Barborough Court was let to that Mr. Jones. But we have never called at Barborough since the Fenwicks ceased to live there, nor have the marquess, or the Sparkletons, or the Dykes, or any of our own set, though they say Mr. Jones is a millionaire. And an Eastern princess, who seems to have arrived here as if she had dropped from the moon, would appear even more of stranger here than if she came from Salford or Preston or Liverpool. Mr. Jones, at any rate, subscribes to everything, and his sons hunt, and his Scotch gardener carries off the best prizes at the

fruit and flower show. Some day, when Sir Anthony dies, we shall hear of his buying the house he rents, and being made a magistrate, and so take his place among county people. But, what can your Begum do if known to nobody ? ”

All this worldly wisdom savored of disappointment and Dead Sea apples to the two light-hearted girls, who found their northern county decidedly dull, though they made the best of it, and who all but envied their brother, their idolized Harry, those gay doings in London, of which only the far-off echo reached their ears.

The Redmaynes, of Old Court, though they had a son in the Guards, and though their pedigree was equal in antiquity to that of the Harringtons, the Dykes, and the Fenwicks, could no more afford a regular season in London than one of the minor kingdoms of Europe can venture on the costly luxury of a great war. Sometimes Mrs. Redmayne was able to compass, for her daughters' sake, six delightful weeks in the Modern Babylon, but more often did the demands of the mortgagees, and the necessity for a reduction of rents, cause the prudent squire to demur at such an outlay.

And here was an illustrious stranger, a gilded, glorious Bird of Paradise from the Far East, come prepared to brighten, with a dash of Oriental splendor, the somewhat monotonous routine of country life, only to be received with headshakings and dubious scrutiny. It was too provoking !

“ I hate conventionality myself,” said Madge, the impulsive ; “ and I think it very hard that there should spring up a prejudice against this lady merely because she is a little different from the humdrum people all around us. And the turbans, too ! It would be heartbreaking not to visit at such a house as that.”

“ My dear, you mistake me,” replied Mrs. Redmayne, placidly. “ Of course we shall know her if other families do. But we must wait to see what introductions she has brought with her.”

“ Depend upon it,” said Clara, confidently, “ she must be known to somebody, and have some reason for choosing her new home here. And she isn't a bit like Mr. Jones, who drops his h's, they say, and eats with his knife. She has sent down fine new furniture from London, though the

Towers, you know, is supposed to be furnished, and still has the old sofas and chairs, no doubt, that belonged to poor Sir Perceval's father or his grandfather. And there are forty men, I believe, at work in the neglected gardens that were a wilderness of weeds. And her carriage horses are as showy as Lord Cheviot's own. I suppose she is a widow, but she is certainly young—young and beautiful, so every one who has seen her declares. But, of course, in her own style, dark, and rather large made."

"And just the person to give enjoyable parties," suggested Madge.

"I daresay she is," calmly answered Mrs. Redmayne. "And so, perhaps, may have been the Queen of Sheba, to whom your ideal portrait of the new-comer presents more than one point of resemblance. Well, you have aroused my curiosity, although I think, by nature, I am the reverse of inquisitive, and had I been in Fatima's position, am quite certain that I should never have cared to peep into the forbidden chamber, nor meddle with Bluebeard Pasha's keys. I should like, at any rate, at some archery meeting, or on other neutral ground, to see this extraordinary and fascinating stranger, the very report of whose appearance and surroundings has bewitched you both. It is a capital old house, the Towers, and one at which I remember to have danced and dined long ago—before your papa and I were married, or even engaged. And if the princess, as you call her, does but turn out to be acquainted with somebody, I admit that she may prove a valuable acquisition to the neighborhood. But here comes your brother," she added, as, at that moment, the door opened, and Harry Redmayne's tall figure and good-looking, good-humored face became visible.

"Here I am, mother, and before tea time, it seems," said the guardsman, sauntering in, wearing his shooting coat and leather gaiters with the same easy grace with which he wore scarlet and gold when on duty.

"Have you seen the Begum?" impetuously exclaimed both sisters at once.

"Begum! What Begum?" demanded Harry, with a slight yawn. "Oh, yes, I know now what you two are talking about. Yes, I've seen her, in her carriage at least—met her as I was driving back from Spark's" ("Spark's" was Lord Sparkleton), "but, at any rate, I had a good look at her, and by Jove! isn't she handsome?"

The two Miss Redmaynes cast triumphant glances at their mother, for Harry, with them, was a domestic oracle, and his outspoken admiration of the stranger seemed to them to sanction the rose-colored picture that they had been pleased to draw. But just then the tea equipage was brought in, and the apparition of egg-shell china and frosted silver somehow turned the conversation into a new channel, and no more was said for the present of the remarkable tenant of Saxham Towers.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

IT was a dark and lowering evening late in September. It was already half-past seven o'clock, some half hour before dinner time at Greystone Abbey, when a little wooden side door, in the remotest angle of the shrubbery, was silently opened, and a figure slowly, and, as it seemed, cautiously, slipped through, and reclosed the door as noiselessly as it had been opened.

The door led into a lane that skirted the grounds and the park wall of Greystone, and which, at that hour, was even less frequented than usual. Unseen, then, and unnoted, the solitary figure passed on, and presently reached the high road, bordered to the right by a belt of shaggy and tangled woodland, and to the left by the brown heathclad surface of an apparently limitless moor.

Through the deepening twilight, along the lonely road, the figure pressed on quickly, but pausing often, as if to make sure that it was not dogged by any stealthy spy.

The figure was that of a young and active man; one, too, who could walk well. Indian Shikarees, trained to guide European sportsmen through the jungle and across rocky nullahs, used to say that Richard Harrington's springy tread and untiring spirit wore out the best of them on such expeditions.

His step was as swift as in those days, but he carried a load of care with him now that made his demeanor contrast strongly with the frank, bright bearing that had once been his. Why should a baronet slink, like a thief under cloud

of night, from his own house, or why should he thread his way by devious tracks, turning his head often to assure himself that he was secure from prying eyes? It was a wild night ; the cloud rack hurried on before the frequent gusts of wind, and there was no moon to replace the sun that had set sullenly in an orange-colored haze of watery vapor.

Through the dusk, Sir Richard strode on, keeping as close to the edge of the dark wood as possible, while to the left spread the grand desolation of the heathery moor.

Twice the approaching sound of wheels along the road made him start like a hunted stag that hears the distant baying of the hounds, and each time he glided into the wood, and placed himself behind a tree until the approaching vehicle had passed.

The first sound was produced by a farmer's tax cart jogging back from market. The second was caused by the passage of the open carriage from Old Court, bringing Mrs. Redmayne and her daughters home to dinner from some outlying visit.

But in both cases, Sir Richard remained motionless in his lurking place until the noise had died away in the distance, and then resumed his solitary walk.

Some twenty minutes, and he found himself at the lodge gates of Saxham Towers. The gates, as chance would have it, stood conveniently open, so that the baronet passed on, unchallenged, beneath the shadow of the great trees bordering the carriage road, still doing all he could to escape notice, until the mansion itself, with its lofty towers and gables and vanes and imposing frontage, was reached, and he was, as it were, compelled to reveal himself. He approached the front door, and, with a hesitating hand, rang the door bell.

The door was soon opened, disclosing, instead of the ordinary British footman, an Oriental servant, clad in spotless linen and snowy turban, with a silver badge in front of it, engraved with some heraldic emblem, and with a crimson scarf drawn tightly round his slender waist.

"The Mam Sahib is at dinner, sir," said this attendant in tolerably pure English, and then showed all his shining teeth in a grin of recognition. "Why, it is the Ric Sahib !" he exclaimed, salaaming.

"To be sure it is," answered Sir Richard, in his turn

remembering the lithe form and brown face of this Eastern importation. "And I am sure, too, Nena Singh, that your mistress will see me. Here is my card, which you had better take to her at once."

Nena Singh obeyed, and quickly returned, with a fresh grin and a renewed salaam.

"This way, if master pleases," he said, deferentially; and, under his guidance, the baronet was inducted into the drawing-room, where large lamps of strange shapes threw a mellow light on the rich furniture of silk and gold and rare wood; the ample curtains, the marble statues, the great porcelain vases and gilded *jardinières* full of costliest flowers, of which all Wortham and its vicinity had been talking.

The fashionable London upholsterer had done his best to gratify so wealthy a customer; and the mirrors and hangings, the ottomans, the velvet carpets: everything told of splendor and luxury.

The heavy scent of perfumes filled the air and mingled with the scent of the masses of hothouse flowers, while strange, Oriental knick-knacks and gewgaws, such as fans of peacocks' plumage, ostrich eggs hooped around with gold, and jars of antique enamel or metal work, were strewn here and there in picturesque confusion.

Sir Richard had refused to be seated. He remained standing under the soft light of the alabaster lamps, looking bitterly, and, as it were, resentfully, around. Some of the objects that met his gaze he had seen before far away from Saxham Towers.

There was a jeweled dagger, for instance, lying beside a fan, on a tiny table, a dagger of which the sheath blazed with emeralds and diamonds, and around the haft of which was twined a serpent, modeled in pure soft gold, and with ruby eyes that seemed to threaten. How often had she told him—she who was now the mistress of the Towers—that that dagger was poisoned, and that a scratch from the keen point meant agony and death.

It was an unsafe toy to leave, as this was left, and might be dangerous otherwise than by accident. She, to whom it belonged, was, as he firmly believed, capable of anything, if once the fiend within her nature were aroused.

He had heard of strange deeds done, otherwise than by the poniard, by those whose blood, like hers, was dashed

with that of Asiatic strain. A mere cup of coffee, a glass of sherbet, might at any moment be fraught with something deadly, and——

Ah, here she is !

Slowly, majestically almost, the present occupant of Saxham Towers sailed into the room. There could be no mistake about her beauty. Harry Redmayne was quite right.

She was a splendid-looking woman ; large, dark complexioned with a wealth of black silken hair, in which pearls and gold thread had been cunningly entwined, and with features that were more than handsome. Her great, lustrous eyes, the long dark lashes of which, when the eyes were not raised, rested on the smooth cheek, were eloquent with expression ; and the mouth was exquisite in shape, save that the red lips were rather too full and pouting. Her age might have been conjectured to be five-and-twenty ; but, Indian born though she was, she yet retained the nameless charm of early, youthful loveliness.

There could be no question that her beauty was of a sleepy, voluptuous type that was thoroughly Oriental, and as little that her wrath, if once awakened, might be worth reckoning with.

She was richly dressed, in glistening silk mixed with some gauzy material, and wore more ornaments than are usual in Europe. How well he knew the red light of the costly rubies that adorned her bracelets, and that moony necklace of huge pearls, fastened with a clasp in brilliants, that encircled her graceful neck ! That there was something queenly and Cleopatra-like about her was undeniable. It is no wonder that public rumor proclaimed her a princess. Her face was brightened by a smile as she came in.

“ You are welcome—welcome to my new home,” she said, putting out her hand.

The baronet bowed with ceremonious deference, but he did not touch the proffered hand.

“ I received your letter from London, saying that you were coming to live at the Towers,” he said ; “ and so I am here.”

She had sunk, by this time, into the midst of a nest of silken cushions on the nearest sofa, and had taken up the fan, of red flamingo feathers, and gold and ivory, that lay on the table beside the poisoned dagger. Sir Richard remained standing, as before.

"We meet again, under altered circumstances," said his hostess, slowly waving her fan to and fro, and fixing her speaking eyes upon his pale, fair face. "Your manner—excuse me, Sir Richard—is as chilly as your execrable English climate, at which I shiver, even in the summertide. I am not, as you remember, of the frigid temperament which suits your pallid skies and misty landscapes. With me, it must be hate or love. Which, Sir Richard, do you choose?"

He made no reply, but again bent his head.

"Many things have happened since we met," he said, guardedly; "and I have had my share of sorrow and of trouble."

"I know that, and more," rejoined the mistress of the house. "For instance, how all but proved is now the treacherous murder of the missing man."

The baronet started as if stung.

"Too horrible!" he exclaimed. "Murdered? You cannot mean it! He—murdered!"

The lady of the Towers laughed a little laugh, hard and cruel.

"Your surprise, Sir Richard, does you credit," she replied, mockingly; "I should have thought that you, of all mankind, were likely to be well informed on such a subject."

The baronet's stalwart frame shook, as if with palsy, and he grasped the gilded back of a crimson sofa near him for support.

"I swear to you," he answered hoarsely—"I swear, Zenobia, by all that I hold holy, that I did not know it; but even you admit that the—the thing has not been proved."

"Well, no, not quite, as yet," she answered, nonchalantly; "and you do well to keep your secret and affirm your innocence, but, you see, I have the means to mar your life, to blight your prospects." Then, with a sudden change of tone, she added, "But, why, oh, why, my once dear Richard, should we speak thus, as enemies speak? Surely you have not forgotten that you loved me, I you, then a penniless subaltern, without fortune or expectations. I was engaged to be your wife. I gave you all my love. My large fortune was to be freely yours. Since then you have become rich and titled. But is your

soul so base and mean as to make that sudden rise in life an excuse for breach of faith? Surely not. Again, Richard, it is Zenobia who offers her all—her heart, her wealth, all that a woman can give—for your love ! ”

She bent her eyes upon him as she spoke—eyes that seemed to speak ; and then what music in her low rich voice ! It was a voice whose witchery it was hard to resist. It went on : “ Let there be a renewal of the old love, dear Richard—my Richard, my betrothed—and let all the past—all—be buried in oblivion for ever ! ”

He stood, leaning on the sofa to which his hand clung, and his color rose and fell.

“ I cannot, Zenobia,” he said, at last, in low and broken accents, “ answer you now as you would wish. Time—only give me time to think. I am unable even to comprehend what you have now hinted to me—the hideous deed which—I am not able, on the spur of the moment, to reply as befits our position with respect to one another. Let me have some respite—some time to think it over. Then I will come again.”

She bent forward towards him. She was so near that he could distinguish the odor of the musky Oriental perfume that he so well remembered.

“ Oh, Richard, am I not still beautiful ? ” she asked, reproachfully.

“ Yes, you are still most beautiful,” he answered, hoarsely, and averting his eyes from those dark, lustrous orbs that sought to enslave his will ; “ but I cannot—cannot bear this for to-night. Give me time.”

She sighed softly.

“ I will wait,” she said, very gently, and no longer using the imperious tone in which she had commenced the conversation. “ Yes, dear lover, dear husband that is to be, I will wait. You have had much, as I know, to trouble you, poor boy. Think it over, then, my Richard, but let your answer, when given, be that which you know would gladden poor Zenobia’s heart.”

He squeezed the soft, plump hand that she had placed in his—his own fingers, as he did so, were cold as marble—and could scarcely trust his voice to say, “ Yes, yes ; but good-night now : I will go ! ”

He lifted, as if mechanically, her hand to his cold lips ; then let it drop, and staggered rather than walked from

the room and from the house, not heeding the salaams of dusky Nena Singh. Once in the open air he seemed to breathe more freely, and strode on until he found himself once more on the high road. He returned home, walking with slow steps, but not taking any particular precautions against observations. This time he chose a longer circuit, passing his own entrance lodge, traversing the park, and ringing the bell at the hall door of the Abbey, somewhat to the astonishment of his servants. Sir Richard then went, as was customary with him, to the library. The old butler made haste to light lamps and candles.

“What time would you please to have dinner, Sir Richard?” he asked.

“I have dined,” curtly answered the baronet; and there was nothing left for Morris but to bow and retire.

“Something wrong with the governor,” was the verdict of the household. Something, indeed, was wrong with Sir Richard Harrington: badly, bitterly wrong.

CHAPTER XV.

A LETTER FROM THE TOWERS.

BREAKFAST at Greystone Abbey was over. Sir Richard, whose appetite on that morning had been sharpened by the dinnerless conclusion of the previous day, had scarcely completed his solitary meal when a scented letter was put into his hands. It had been brought over, as the butler averred, by a mounted messenger from Saxham Towers. The baronet, with peevish impatience, tore open the hated missive. What, he asked himself, was the use of all the caution he had exercised, when this irrepressible woman chose to set discretion at naught, and to proclaim to local gossips that he and she were well acquainted? Even if Morris had not mentioned whence came the note, he would have recognized her hand-writing among a thousand. The very perfume that clung to the smooth, thick paper was but too familiar to him. He glanced at the contents of the letter, and then rose, and going to a side table tossed off two successive glasses of cherry brandy to steady his

nerves. Then he reseated himself, and this is what he read :—

“DEAR FRIEND,—Yes, dear friend ! for though I received, last night, no explicit answer to all I had to urge, my womanly instinct assures me that you are my friend, and always will be, as in days of old. But I am writing, now, for a purpose, and I will tell you what it is. It is not right—either for you, dear Richard, or for me—you see that I identify our interests—that I should be left any longer in this dubious position, ignored by my equals, and a mere source of wonder to the gaping crowd. I think it must have occurred, even to you—and men are less sensitive than we are—that I, who am in England for your sake, am a stranger in the land, and that I am not yet acquainted with any of your neighbors and friends. This must be remedied.”

He uttered a fierce oath here, and seemed as though he were about to tear the letter into fragments, but prudence prevailed.

“It might have been worse !” he muttered. “Yes, it might have been worse. I think I see her drift, and, at any rate, time may be gained, and circumstances may alter.

He continued, then, the perusal of the letter, which went on as follows :—

“I look to you to introduce me—into the society of your native county, I mean, of course—and I need not say that I rely on your willingness to do so as soon as possible, since this unaccustomed solitude is irksome to me ; nor is my present anomalous position one which befits my station or my rank.”

Again the baronet uttered an angry exclamation, and struck his heel upon the floor ; but he calmed himself, and read on :—

“If there should be any party, any social gathering, projected among your friends at which I might suitably make my first appearance, you might probably procure me an invitation, and request one of the ladies who are known to you to present me, but in all respects I am willing to conform to the exigences of your English etiquette. In any case I look to you for help, and trust that you will write to me at once to say how you can best manage this, and what you think will be best for

“Your loving *fiancée*,
“ZENOBIA STONE.

“P.S.—Of course, I could not consent to be introduced by anybody of inferior standing. The lady whose good offices alone I could accept must be of equal rank with myself, but this will already have occurred to you.”

He flung the letter from him and drummed petulantly on the table with his fingers. What was he to do? Conscience made a coward of him—of him whose nerves, when confronted by physical peril, had never yet proved unsteady. He did not dare to refuse. And yet it was but yesterday that he had hoped to keep his knowledge of this woman a secret from those very neighbors with whom she now so imperiously insisted that he should make her acquainted.

She had a hold on him that he could not shake off, and perhaps it was well that she had ceased to press for a reply to the point-blank question of the night before, and that she appeared to postpone her claim, to a matrimonial alliance at least, for the moment. But what she asked of him was, nevertheless, hard to grant—harder to deny. He was still a very young man, and had spent some years in India; but he was pretty well aware of the barrier of prejudice which a stranger such as Zenobia would have to elude or overleap before she could be recognized by the little great world of that northern shire. Yet it was not safe to thwart her, even by hesitating to comply.

He buried his head in his hands, and for some minutes remained deep in thought. At last he rose from his chair.

“I think I can contrive it,” he said, slowly, as he twisted the tawny moustache that shaded his lip. “I think I can contrive it, and I must, if I strain my influence to the uttermost. It must be done. As well trifle with a chained tigress as with that woman. I feel like some poor wretch, in old legends of the Middle Ages, who has signed a compact with the Fiend, and must fulfill the conditions of the cruel bond, or pay the grim forfeit. She knows her power only too well. It suits her humor, now, to obtain access to society, here in England, by my means, and I cannot, dare not, say her nay! I would fain have kept our acquaintance dark, but she will not have it so. She is not content to parade her insolent wealth and splendor before a mere mob of gazers, but must have the suffrages of the ‘Upper Ten’ as well. And it is to me—confound her!—that she addresses herself thus confidently to further her wishes. I almost loathe myself because I am forced to do her bidding. Yet I must do it. I will see the marquess this very day. Meanwhile—”

He did not conclude the sentence, but, carefully refold-

ing the letter which had produced so disturbing an effect, he thrust it into the breast pocket of his coat, and repairing to the library sat down to answer it. For a long time he remained there, pen in hand, irresolutely looking at the blank sheet of note paper before him. Hating the part he had to play, he did not know how to play it to the best advantage. At last he penned the following lines :—

“DEAR ZENOBIA,—I think I can manage this for you. Very glad to be of service. At all events I will try. You shall hear again from me in a day or two.

“Sincerely yours,

“RICHARD HARRINGTON.”

This letter, duly enclosed in its sealed envelope, addressed to “Mrs. Stone,” was despatched with all promptitude to Saxham Towers. And then, Sir Richard bethought him, that he must make his words good. He must see the Marquess of Cheviot, on Zenobia’s behalf, that very day.

CHAPTER XVI.

SIR RICHARD’S INTERVIEW WITH THE MARQUESS.

“I HAVE the greatest wish to meet *your* wishes, Harrington, my dear boy!” Such had been the genial reply with which the marquess met the request of Sir Richard Harrington.

The very familiarity of the address meant much, for the owner of Hurst Royal had a strong sense of personal dignity which never forsook him, and which made him more punctilious towards others than is the case with many a well-meaning man. Lord Cheviot had conceived a great liking, as well as a high esteem, for his young neighbor, and he gave token of it by occasionally dropping the formal “Sir Richard,” and calling the baronet simply by his surname.

The two gentlemen were in the library at Hurst Royal, a room that differed considerably from the apartment at Greystone which bore the same name. The latter, as we

know, had been the abbot's parlor, and retained somewhat of its old ecclesiastical aspect. That at Hurst Royal was much larger and much better lighted, and had pillars and cornices of yellow Italian marble, a painted ceiling gorgeous with mythology, several tables littered with modern literature of all sorts, and a door opening into what was called the book room, wherein, amidst well-crammed shelves of tomes, folios, and duodecimos, sat a spectacled librarian, busied in compiling a new catalogue of old books and black-letter manuscripts.

In the so-called library itself there were statues and pictures, and lounging chairs and easy sofas, and a thick carpet on which the feet made no sound. A pleasanter room, or a more comfortable one, it would be hard to find anywhere, and male visitors at Hurst Royal always remembered it with affection.

"You knew this lady, then, in India?" said the marquess again, after a pause.

"I knew her well, and so did my poor brother, Lionel," he made answer; "and very kind and friendly she was to us both. At Futtehpore she was quite the queen of local society, and her house a very pleasant one, for as I have told you, her fortune was large and her hospitality boundless."

"Yes, yes, I can well imagine that," rejoined the marquess.

In his heart of hearts he sincerely wished that the lady had remained in India. He wanted to oblige his young friend, but a Begum was an awkward sort of personage for whom to stand sponsor, socially.

"Her name is Mrs. Stone, and yet she is, I think you mentioned, of foreign origin, and has native blood in her veins. Is there not, excuse me, a prejudice, perhaps unreasonable, against such persons, on the part of English residents in India?" asked the marquess.

Sir Richard was prepared for such a question, and had his answer ready.

"Undoubtedly there is such a prejudice," he replied. "Country-born people of mixed descent—Eurasians is the more civil appellation—have to contend with a feeling similar to that which exists in America, where persons of color are concerned. And what seems odd to us, they are looked down upon in a still greater degree, by high-

caste natives of whichever creed. In Mrs. Stone's case an exception was made. Her father was a poor soldier of fortune, but still of noble birth and old lineage. His name was the Vicomte de Lisle, and he got into the military service of the Nizam, and commanded, I believe, some of those Arab mercenaries of whom our own Government felt so excusably jealous. He married, I understand, a native Mohammedan lady in religion—at Hyderabad. There is plenty of good blood among the natives, both Hindoo and Mussulman, as I daresay you are aware."

The marquess was too well educated a man not to have heard of Rajpoot pedigrees that stretch beyond the time of Solomon and the Siege of Troy, and of Moslem houses dating from an epoch contemporary with the Norman Conquest. And then there was a French Viscount, cited as the immediate progenitor of the lady whom he was asked to patronize. He begun to entertain a higher opinion of the Begum of Saxham Towers. But he wished to hear more.

"Mrs. Stone is, of course, a widow?" he said, toying with a paper knife.

"The widow of a very rich commercial man, much older than herself," answered Sir Richard, blandly, "who left her his large fortune quite unfettered by conditions, as I have heard. He was, I think, a Bombay merchant, but of that I am not quite sure. She was, however, very young when she married, within a short time of her being left an orphan, and Mr. Stone has now been dead for some years. His widow has always mixed in the best European society, and is known to possess, besides considerable wealth in Government securities, a jaghire or large estate, somewhere in Upper India, on which she has been accustomed to spend a part of every year. Such possessions in India confer almost feudal authority over thousands of poor cultivators; and it quite depends on the disposition of the Zemindar whether his sway proves a curse or a blessing to these people. But report affirms that Mrs. Stone is deservedly popular with her tenantry, and I, for one, can well believe it."

The marquess' countenance brightened. This superb Begum, then, understood, as he did, that property had its duties as well as its rights. He always found his own farmers, and especially his own colliers, difficult enough to

deal with, in seasons of discontent, but, on the whole, he knew that he was personally liked, even by those who tried to get the better of him. Visions of a yellow plain studded with villages inhabited by a swarming population of dusky vassals, clad in white, and wearing the minimum of apparel, on account of climate and economy, floated vaguely before his mental vision, but he would not have cared to exchange his English estates for those of Mr. Stone's widow. Yet it was much to the credit of the latter that she should have won golden opinions in her capacity of Lady Paramount over her dark-skinned dependants.

"I am afraid," said the marquess, changing his ground, "that your friend the Begum will find England, or, at any rate, our neighborhood, somewhat dull and monotonous after leading what must, I should think, have been a very enjoyable life out in India."

Sir Richard smiled.

"She may, after trying the experiment," he made answer; "but just at present she is disposed to regard our country as an earthly Paradise. You can hardly understand, Lord Cheviot, what England must appear to those who have never seen it, but have been accustomed to hear its praises continually chanted by hundreds who grow impatient of their exile in the East, and whose patriotism grows warmer with every year spent in Bengal or the Deccan. Our very climate, our very cookery, against which homestayng folk are never weary of inveighing, come to be considered as absolute perfection by Anglo-Indians suffering from hot winds and troublesome servants. I only wish you could hear the outspoken enthusiasm of veteran majors and magistrates who, when once retired on their laurels, and settled at Cheltenham or Brighton, would blossom forth into inveterate grumblers against the British drizzle and the British cookmaid, our fogs and our rheumatics."

The marquess laughed.

"I hope," he said, in his courteous way, "that the lady of Saxham Towers may have no very trying disappointment to encounter during her sojourn amongst us. And I trust, I am sure, that her stay, be it long or short, may somehow be rendered pleasant to her. As I said, Sir Richard, I should be glad to serve any friend of yours,

and if the person for whom you spoke had been some former brother officer, nothing on earth would have been easier ; but with ladies it is different, and etiquette and forms have to be attended to. If you will excuse my leaving you for a moment I will talk it over with my daughter, and we shall then see what can be done."

Left alone, the smile died out on Sir Richard's young face as suddenly as some fickle gleam of sunshine deserts a wintry landscape, and he looked quite sad and anxious too as, with compressed lips and thoughtful eyes, he sat waiting. Not a glance had he to spare for the painted mythology blushing above, or the stately Corinthian columns of yellow Carrara marble, or the luxurious furniture of Lord Cheviot's library. Not a thought had he of the treasured books which cumbered the shelves next door, or of the ancient manuscripts hoarded in press and cabinet, and which, to the careful and erudite librarian, seemed as important a trust as did the historical plate to the steady chief butler. He was quite absorbed in the probable result of his own unwelcome embassy, and could think of nothing else. Had he been actually on his trial for some great crime, and awaiting the return of the jury, he could not well have worn an expression of more carking care than now sat upon his fair features.

Suppose the decision of Lady Egeria should be in the negative ? Women, he knew, have all manner of prejudice where a stranger of their own sex, a stranger of doubtful or mysterious antecedents, is concerned. "Proud as a Fitzurse !" was an expression that Sir Richard remembered to have heard from his old nurse, in very early days indeed, and it had passed into a local proverb. He remembered that statuesque attitude that was habitual to Lady Egeria, and the calm pride of her clear eyes, a pride that seemed a part of herself.

Not that he had had to complain, from the first, of any haughtiness or coldness on the part of the family at Hurst Royal ; but then he was a Harrington, and the friendship between his own race and the still grander stock of Fitzurse was hereditary. The marquess was the kindest of men. Lady Egeria had come to speak to Richard Harrington, her rejected suitor, with almost sisterly frankness and good nature.

A great peer like Lord Cheviot may perhaps feel in his

heart of hearts that his degree is more exalted than that of a great commoner, like the baronet of Greystone Abbey, but never had he by word or look betrayed such a sentiment. Once received at Hurst Royal on intimate terms a guest was made to feel himself the equal of his entertainers.

Very bitter, however, were Sir Richard's thoughts as he waited for the marquess.

"It is so easy," he muttered, "to say 'no,' and yet I may as well put a pistol to my head as try to stave off yonder exacting fury by lame excuses for not complying with her commands. Yes, it is easy to say 'no.' But those who use the formula are not aware how often it may sound, in the ears of people who are denied some boon, like an actual doom of death."

Presently the marquess came back, radiant with good humor, and it needed but a glance at his face to see that he had not come as a messenger of ill.

"Well, Harrington," he said, genially, "I have explained the matter to Egeria, and have told her who this lady is, and whence she comes and why you wish, out of gratitude for past kindness, that her stay in England here should be made as pleasant as possible. My daughter has accepted without hesitation the office of being sponsor for this Mrs. Stone, socially speaking. There—there! no thanks! not the least need for that. Egeria desired me to say that after your noble courage in saving her, that Black Water day, she can refuse you nothing, and that you may fully reckon on her assistance. If you like, she and I will go with you any day you please—except next Thursday; Thursday I shall be busy; promised to meet the delegates of those Silverseam Colliery hands on strike, over at Wortham—to call at Saxham Towers and make acquaintance with Mrs. Stone. After that, nothing can be easier when next a party is given than to ask for a card of invitation for her. She can go, then, with Lady Egeria in the carriage, and be introduced to her hostess and the principal people there. And then every one will call, and she will be in the thick of whatever goes on, such as it is. Not going, my dear boy? You must stay to luncheon."

But for luncheon Sir Richard would not remain. He sent his warm thanks by the marquess for Lady Egeria's great kindness with reference to his request, and fixed on

Tuesday, if convenient, as the date for the proposed visit to the Towers ; and then he shook hands with the marquess, and his horses were ordered round.

Once in the saddle, and out of sight of the windows of Hurst Royal, Sir Richard was able to be natural again.

"It is lucky," he muttered, stroking his tawny moustache as he rode slowly on through the deer-haunted park, with its vistas of craggy and heath-crested uplands beyond, "that we do not live in the Palace of Truth, and that the language of diplomacy is safely to be employed, A pretty picture I have drawn this day, touched up with rose color and with nothing in it to which British prudery could object."

Here Wildfire snorted and reared, and then plunged, as hot tempered horses, especially chestnuts, often do, on some trifling provocation, in a manner that might have been disagreeable to some riders. But Sir Richard sat his fiery steed in apparent unconsciousness of this revolt, and pursued the current of his own thoughts.

"How could I ever have been mad enough to think, even when I had no more chance of Greystone than of becoming Emperor of China, of marrying such a woman as that? I'm certain she must have bewitched me somehow. It could not have been her confounded money, in the coarse and common acceptation of the word. I am no fortune hunter, and I should have felt more than half ashamed to handle those money bags that old Stone left to his beautiful widow. I did not venture to hint to the marquess how that precious old rascal raked together his rupees. An opium smuggler in the days of the old China War, a partner of Hassan Ali, the great Arab slave dealer whose dhows, full of African captives destined for the markets of Persia and Yemen, were always being chased by Her Majesty's gunboats across the Red Sea. Add to these illicit practices that of usury on a grand scale, from farming the revenue of an indolent Rajah to accommodating some feather-pated subaltern with a loan at cent per cent., and there you have the sources of Mr. Stone's fortune.

"I have romanced somewhat, too, as to my fair friend's pedigree. Of course, there was a germ of truth. Zenobia's father, the French renegade, who literally sold his soul in turning Moslem to curry favor with the Nizam and his Vizier, and who was known at Hyderabad as Sirdar

Abdallah, really was the Vicomte de Lisle. But the native lady of rank whom he wedded in his old age was but a Bayadere, a professional dancing girl, whose beauty and fascinating arts her only child inherited, along with a mass of other Oriental qualities, though the viscount chose to have his daughter educated at Madras as a Christian, and gave her every accomplishment that money could buy. Then he died, and she was pretty enough and clever enough to make old Stone lay himself and his dirty money at her feet. She married him, and he died, and his ill-got wealth bought her admission into European society, thanks to the skill with which she played her cards. In England people are apt to be more squeamish. I wonder what the marquess would have said if he had known the whole truth about the Begum—ay, and Lady Egeria too? Ha! you brute, you want to have that fire taken out of you, do you?"

He tightened the reins as he spoke, and let his plunging horse feel the sharp spurs. Off flew the fiery chestnut at racing speed, the startled groom riding hard behind to keep his master in view. On this occasion, Sir Richard did not select the shortest road to his home, and when, at last he reached Greystone, and Wildfire, with heaving flanks and heat-stained skin, was led round to the stable yard, the fire, for that time at least, had been effectually taken out of him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAWN MEET.

VISITS had been exchanged between the Begum of Saxham Towers and the most noble family at Hurst Royal. Lady Egeria had kept to the spirit as well as the letter of her promise, and had been very gracious to the new comer. Mrs. Stone had since received from Sir Richard Harrington a card of invitation to a breakfast party to be given at Greystone Abbey on the occasion of a lawn meet of the Border Foxhounds. And Lady Egeria was pledged to call at the Towers, and convey its mistress in her carriage to Greystone, there to be made known to the magnates of the county.

It was early October now ; too early for the legitimate pursuit of Reynard to have begun, and tough old Sir Simon, the M.F.H., grumbled somewhat at being asked to arrange a lawn meet at the Abbey, when mere cub-hunting was the order of the day.

“Hang me if these ladies don’t seem to regard the hounds as a Punch and Judy sort of affair !” growled the veteran, “and me as the showman. Whereas, with those who understand the thing, hunting is a business.”

However, he agreed to come, and that the mottled pack that he called his “beauties,” and of whose performance he was so amusingly proud, should ornament the wide lawn of the ancient Abbey. The late Sir George had been a stout supporter of the noble sciences, and his son, if less interested in rural sport, at any rate, kept up his subscription, while the keepers on the Harrington estate would as soon have trapped a sheep as a fox.

The auspicious day came in due course, and it was one of those on which the much-abused English climate is at its best. There was a peculiar touch of soft, mellow radiance in the clear sky, a particular sparkle in the balmy, sun-gilded air, that might in vain have been looked for on the continental side of the Channel. It seemed as if Autumn had dressed herself in smiles to make up to mortals for the departure of jocund Summer.

The oaks were golden green yet, relieved by patches of russet, and the beech trees showed a tint of palest bronze. Yellow sheets of gorse blossom and broom flower fringed the hillsides, and the purple heather of the moors rolled away in endless varieties of color. No need to consult barometers to see whether rain was to be feared. “Set fair” was written, in characters sufficiently legible to the weatherwise, on the sunflecked woolpacks of white vapor that sailed lazily before the gentle breezes across the blue of the sky, and in the very lights and shadows that played on tree trunk and peach wall.

It was no secret among the invited, or the uninvited either, for that matter, that young Sir Richard was giving this party for the especial benefit of the semi-Oriental tenant of Saxham Towers, and that the Marquess of Cheviot and his daughter had exercised some sort of influence, direct or indirect, to ensure that the baronet’s invitation should be accepted by many who might otherwise have shrunk from meeting the strange Begum.

“ If they have taken her up at Hurst Royal, there’s no more to be said ! ” was a remark made by a good many ladies who knew they were to encounter beneath the Abbey roof the splendid stranger, whose irruption into that quiet country nook they had at first been somewhat inclined to resent. It was certain, now, that the house of Fitzurse had extended its distinguished patronage to this Mrs. Stone from India. Wherefore Mrs. Stone from India, like plate that has been stamped with the hall mark, was understood henceforward to pass everywhere as genuine metal and no counterfeit.

A lawn meet, when favored by the weather, is commonly a pretty sight. The hounds, the horses, the gleams of scarlet are well set off by the greenery and the trees, and a domestic architecture that may vary between Norman gateways and turrets, Tudor gables and vanes and latticed windows, or the comfortable red brick ugliness of the Georgian reigns.

The venerable stones of the old Abbey, glistening in the sunlight, looked well, and the huge trees of the park, which must have been old when Naseby and Marston Moor were fresh-fought fields, towered majestic, to the right and left of the carriage road by which the mansion was approached. The breakfast was in itself a sumptuous affair, beyond the organization of the excellent old house-keeper, and a London provider of such entertainments had received *carte blanche* to send down what was wanted, and had executed the order on a large and lavish scale.

Too many guests were expected for the dining-room to be of much use. It was in the old hall, once the refectory of the Abbey, that the festivities were to take place. How little had the former monastic owners of Greystone, as they trooped in, two and two, in cowl and robe, at the ringing of a deep-toned bell, dreamed of a day to come when mere secular company of both sexes should banquet there ; pink coats and top boots side by side with silks and laces and velvet, and scarcely a soul of those present have even a thought to spare for those by whom the pile was reared, and the lands reclaimed from their original condition of swamp and brake.

Mrs. Stone arrived presently, in the great yellow barouche from Hurst Royal, seated at Lady Egeria’s side. The marquess, who meant to follow the hounds, had preferred to go across to Grepstone in his brougham.

There was quite a flutter of expectant curiosity among the guests when Zenobia sailed in among them. She was splendid in every sense of the word ; her half Oriental magnificence of dress contrasting with the rich simplicity of Lady's Egeria's attire, and her jewels, worn at that early hour in ignorance or defiance of the unwritten laws of polite society, flashed back the sunlight. And that she was superbly handsome none could well dispute, however little her dark beauty and the strange expression of her lustrous eyes might conciliate the good opinion of those who were prejudiced critics. Her very shawl was such as would have graced a royal wearer in the East, a marvelous fabric in which gold thread blended with many-colored *pushom* from Thibet, and which she wore carelessly, as a mere scarf, over her Lyons velvet and Delhi silk, and cloth of gold. Her very finery seemed a part of herself, so natural to her was it to be surrounded by all that money could buy, and so thoroughly had her ideas been moulded from early days according to the Oriental standard.

Sir Richard came forward to welcome his guests. "Thank you so much !" He took an opportunity of saying these words aside to Lady Egeria, who received them with a frank smile.

She did not choose to encourage him as a suitor, but she was quite willing to be his friend. And for his sake she had consented to make a quasi-public appearance in company with the lady from India, whom she now proceeded to introduce to what might be considered as the cream of society.

Lady Sparkleton, Mrs. Redmayne, of Old Court, Lady Dyke, Mrs. Fenwick, Lady Margaret Foster, of Thrapley Castle ; these, and others of the same degree, became the acquaintances of the late Mr. Stone's widow. Lady Janet Fitzurse the Begum knew already. A few words, a few smiles, some murmured expressions about "having the pleasure" of calling at Saxham Towers, and the invitation was complete.

The gentlemen present were, for the most part, eager for an introduction to so handsome a woman. The thing was done, and Zenobia as fairly launched in the small whirlpool of county dissipation as if she had been a bride just brought home by one of those born in the purple of local aristocracy. How would one and all of those, who

now accepted her on the faith of Sir Richard's rose-colored history and the Hurst Royal patronage, have recoiled if they had but known the real truth concerning the antecedents of their new neighbor.

And then there was the breakfast itself, with the long tables bright with hothouse flowers and vases of gold and silver, and enlivened by the brisk popping of champagne corks, and the lively flow of conversation that was all the merrier because spurs were jingling and scarlet coats were worn, and some of the ladies wore riding habits, and were prepared to take their share in the more active business of the day. Of course old Sir Simon, the M.F.H., was made much of, as a master generally is, and though he growled, it was in the tone of an amiable bear who is not unwilling to be mollified by bright eyes and honeyed words. Without his growl, Sir Simon would never, in his own opinion, have been able to get on, to give satisfaction, to show sport, to keep rash intruders from riding over his hounds and the young wheat, to be respected alike by the Hunt and by the farmers, and to discharge the other duties of his station. But he reserved his more imperative modes of address for the time when he should be in the saddle and his "beauties" in cover.

There were among the invited some who had no pretensions to take rank with the Upper Ten of the Shire. The Mayor and Town Council of Wortham had been asked, quasi officially, as in Sir George's time. Rough gentlemen farmers, and others who followed the hounds, found a place at the tables, and among them was worthy Dr. Malstock, who had hunted in his bachelor days, and took an honest interest in the sport for its own sake. He had come up in his gig now, determined, through his knowledge of lanes and points of view, to see something of the run after the fox broke away.

But the belle of the occasion, the cynosure of all eyes, was certainly the beautiful Zenobia. She was radiant with smiles and good humor, pleased with her reception, and gracious to all. Seldom had Sir Richard seen her face wear an expression of such serene content.

The truth was that she felt it a kind of triumph to be received at once into the ranks of those whom she had always heard rumor make mention as cold and exclusive to a fault. Breakfast over, the interest centred itself in

what, in Sir Simon's eyes, was the serious business of the day.

There were Bottomley Gorse to draw, and Cranmore Wood, the immemorial haunt of foxes, and where blank days had hitherto been unknown. Horses and carriages came round ; there were mounting and drawing of girths, and adjusting of habits and shortening of stirrup leather, as those who were to follow got ready for the fray.

It was a wide lawn, that of the old Abbey, and so closely shorn with scythe as to resemble a sheet of green velvet, and on its well-mown surface the hounds were picturesquely grouped around their grey-haired huntsman, an oracle in his way, and to whose opinion even Sir Simon secretly deferred. There were even those who said that Purkiss found and killed the foxes, though the M.F.H. had the useful knack of taking credit for successful casts, just as Louis XIV. claimed praise for the victors of Turenne.

At any rate, Purkiss was a personage, and it was curious to see the earnestness with which Sir Simon, as soon as he had swung himself into the saddle, conferred in undertones with his subordinate, like a commander-in-chief conversing with a general of division ere the battle began.

Then the signal was given, and the hounds started at a trot, the whippers-in riding like staff officers beside a column on the march, while, after them, streamed the mounted contingent, and then came the file of carriages.

The two Redmayne girls were on horseback ; so, too, was Lady Sparkleton, who was mounted on a white Arab, with long tail and pinkish nostrils, a gentle creature, but which fidgeted enough to make a great deal of attention necessary on the part of such cavaliers as rode near the professional beauty's bridle rein. Her husband, with Harry Redmayne, had pushed on among the first.

It was Lord Sparkleton's custom on such occasions to give his wife as wide a berth, so to speak, as possible, in the certainty that she would be well taken care of, at gaps and gates, by several somebodies.

The marquess, on his weight-carrying hunter, rode beside Sir Richard, who was on a chestnut called Mayfly, a new purchase of his father's that had never yet been seen in the hunting field, at least in those parts. The Squire of Old Court, on his white-footed cob, professed to be only out to enact the part of escort to his girls, "who might break their necks but for me."

In the Hurst Royal barouche, with its strawberry-leaved coronet on panels and harness, were Lady Egeria and her new friend. And among the other equipages was an empty carriage, drawn by horses as fine as could be furnished by a fashionable dealer at his own price, and which was to receive the present mistress of the Towers when the show should be over and the return home should commence.

A find in the Gorse would have been, on the ladies' account, preferable. But foxes, so early in the autumn, are inconsiderate enough to like the woodlands best, so after a very cursory drawing of the former covert, twang ! twang ! went the horn, and with cracking of whips and halloas to Ranger, Ravager, and Ranter to come to heel, the hounds were hustled out of the furze brake and off to the wood, into which they plunged.

The carriages waited outside. So did Dr. Malstock in his gig, shading his eyes with his hand as he peered upwards to note the exact direction of the wind, and so did not a few riders, notably Squire Redmayne and his girls.

"I know the fox will break on the other side of the wood," poutingly observed Madge, as she rode up to Lady Egeria's carriage, "and we shan't see a bit of it. I do call that so selfish !"

However, before long the music of the hounds, quaveringly began by one, swelled into a chorus, and the fox, as if to vindicate his character from the vague accusation of selfishness, broke, in the most courtier-like fashion, from the shelter of the wood, and went off at a rattling pace across common, pasture and turnips.

"In for a breather, but there'll be a check at Clayland," exclaimed Dr. Malstock, urging his gig horse to its fastest trot, and striking into a narrow lane parallel with the fox's course.

So thought the Squire of Old Court, and hurried his daughters off along the lane too, followed by a dozen more who eschewed cross-country work when it could be avoided. The squadron of horsemen got itself into straggling order out of the wood, Sir Simon and the servants of the Hunt keeping, without apparent effort, close to the racing pack, now in full cry.

The marquess pulled up for a moment to give his coachman instructions.

“ I have told Rogers to drive as quickly as he can to Clayland’s Farm by the road,” he said : “ that will give Mrs. Stone a fair chance of seeing something of the sport—new to her, though very tame, I daresay, after the tigers in India.”

Sir Richard also reined in his horse to say a word or two as he passed, and Zenobia smiled on him, too pointedly perhaps, for he was glad when Mayfly reared erect, and then with a back jump and a vicious sloping of the ears, bored at the bit, and broke away to follow the other steeds.

“ Too hot—too hot ! ” remarked the marquess as his young friend at last got the better of the horse’s temper ; “ but there’s some deep-ploughed land before us that will make the chestnut more reasonable. There goes Sparkleton over the hurdles ! ”

Lord Sparkleton’s example was followed by the baronet, the marquess preferring to lose a few yards and open a gate. Then the chase swept on, but the prediction was fulfilled as to a check near Clayland’s, and when the scent was recovered, the young fox was found, like a hare, to have doubled back to his native wood.

Time, however, had been given for the carriages to come up, and before the horsemen had vanished into the woodlands, Mrs. Stone had caught several glimpses of flashing scarlet and galloping steeds, and of the dappled pack.

“ I hope you have enjoyed it,” said Lady Egeria at parting.

“ Yes, thanks to you, very much indeed ! ” answered the lady of Saxham Towers, with her sweet, false smile.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER LETTER FROM INDIA.

It was exactly a week after the lawn meet of the Border Foxhounds that the marquess at Hurst Royal received a letter which bore an Indian post mark, and which caused him great disquiet. And, indeed, those highly-organized systems of communication which are indispensable to modern society do produce occasional results the most strange and startling.

That network of slender telegraph wires that stands out blackly against the skyline may at any moment be fraught, not merely with tidings of death or ruin, but with messages of doom that are to do the actual work of Nemesis, the Avenger of Guilt.

That quick, imperative postman's knock may herald in as dire a tissue of misfortunes as ever issued from Pandora's fabled box, and no one is so secure from evil news as to be quite indifferent to what the familiar appliances of nineteenth-century civilization may at any time bring home to him.

The letter which occasioned so much mental perturbation to the marquess was from a nephew, and a favorite nephew, of his late wife, a certain Lord Alfred Mortimer, titled subaltern in a Hussar regiment in India. Lord Alfreds and Lord Fredericks are not always very well provided with this world's goods, and this especial scion of the ducal house of Mortimer was under considerable obligations to his uncle by marriage.

The marquess had ample means, and Lord Norham was not an expensive son and heir, so that the noble owner of Hurst Royal had been able to put his purse, more than once, at the disposal of his wife's nephew without feeling himself perceptibly the poorer for the debts he had paid. And young Lord Alfred had the grace to repay this kindness by being a correspondent at other seasons than when he wanted money. The letter which he had recently penned was as follows :—

“MY DEAR UNCLE,—My last was from Delhi, and I mentioned, I think, in it that we seemed likely to remain where we were for some time, but the Government, in its wisdom, knew better, and gave us the route much earlier than was expected. Here we are at Futtehpore, whither we have been ordered to relieve the —th Lancers, who also, I believe, were as much astonished as ourselves at the promptness of their change of station. Perhaps the authorities wanted to see how quickly such a transfer could be effected under the present conditions of road and rail.

“After Delhi this place seems dull. To you, however, who have never been out here in this broiling climate, I daresay one Indian garrison seems very like another ; but, really, Futtehpore is different from anything that I have yet seen in this country. The town—the bazaar, as they are pleased to call it—is but a mean affair, but some of the scenery near is good, and the district far better for sporting purposes than any part of India where I have yet been quartered. Lots of snipe and black partridge in the swamp ; deer, elk, and boars in the jungle ;

and among the hilly tracts further afield, a certainty of bears, and a fair promise of tigers. They say that Amarat Rao, the Rajah, gets up magnificent hunting expeditions now and then, with an army of beaters and a camp equipage fit for a campaign, and I can only hope that I may have the luck to be one of the invited, for I should like to see the Burra Shikar on a grand scale.

“I, for one, shall be glad when the cold season, as they call it, sets in, since this place, when we got to it, was fearfully hot, and Leslie, poor fellow—I think you knew his mother, Lady Laura—of ours, died quite suddenly of sunstroke two days after we arrived. We lost six privates and the regimental sergeant major, a fine old fellow, liked by all, from the same cause. I wish the colonel would be a bit earlier as to the hour of parade, but he sticks to his old habits, just as though we were at Aldershot.

“By-the-bye, there are some very ugly rumors current as to a former officer of the —th Lancers lately in cantonments here, and whose name, since he is a neighbor, must be well known to you. I mean Sir Richard Harrington, who lives, I believe, at Greystone Abbey, where I remember to have dined with old Sir George. People’s tongues wag, and he is accused for nothing less than murder—the murder, as I understand, of a wandering European adventurer called Travers or Travis, and who was once a hanger on of the Rajah here.

“India, you must know, my dear uncle, is a sad place for tattle and scandal of all sorts, but this charge goes beyond mere gossip, and sounds very serious, though improbable. Some people will have it that there was ill blood between this fellow Travers and Mr. Harrington as he was then. One thing is sure; the man has been mysteriously missing ever since a date that nearly coincides with Harrington’s departure from this country. He was a sort of vagabond, like most Europeans who come out here, unaccredited, to try to pick up a livelihood among the natives, but they say he was a sort of a gentleman, too, in manners and address. At the palace they profess to know nothing, but that he was suddenly lost sight of. The brigadier in command got the Resident to ask the prince himself if he could throw any light on the matter, but he, like others, was unable to solve the riddle. He interrogated his servants, etc., but with no result. Of Harrington the Rajah speaks in very high terms, since, it seems, he was often at the palace, and always asked to those hunting parties that I mentioned; but, as for the lost man, nobody has any positive certainty as to his fate.

“There have, it seems, been inquiries set on foot, in a half-legal, half-private way, at the instigation of some relatives or friends, I suppose, of this same lost man, who suspect foul play; and rightly or wrongly, public report mingles Lieutenant Harrington’s name with his; hard upon him, I admit, if this be all moonshine and he as ignorant of this fellow’s whereabouts as the rest of us. I really think it would be but fair, when you see Sir Richard, to tell him how people’s tongues are busy with his name, and so give him an opportunity of clearing his reputation, which I am sure, I, though a stranger to him, should be glad to hear that he had done. This has grown to be an unconsciously long letter, so I will only beg to be kindly remembered to my cousin,

Egeria, and to Lady Janet Fitzurse, if she is still at Dower House, and remain, affectionately,

ALFRED E. MORTIMER.

“Futtehpore, Sep.—, 18—.

“P.S.—The missing man’s name, I have just heard, is Walter Travis. He was a sort of a sub-surveyor on the railway before he got into the employ of the Rajah, and that is all that is known of his antecedents.”

To say that this letter disquieted the recipient is to use a mild phrase. The Marquess of Cheviot stared blankly at the words he read, and then perused the unlucky document for a second and a third time, as if to make quite sure that there was no mistake.

His state of mind was a painful one. He did not in the least believe in the truth of so horrible an accusation against his young friend and neighbor, but it was shocking and monstrous to him that such a report should be in circulation. The marquess was a good man and the very soul of honor, and slow to think evil. What was he to do? It seemed to him a kind of insult to tell the young master of Greystone that rumor chose to make him a murderer.

And yet, would it be acting a friendly part to keep silence, and leave Sir Richard unaware of the vile whispers that were current concerning him? These infamous stories could not be ignored. They should be met and refuted, and their authors, if discoverable, brought to punishment; so the marquess honestly opined. But none the less did he shrink from defiling his own lips by the mention of such a charge.

Lady Egeria was unable, throughout that day, to account for the change that had come over her father’s manner. The marquess was one of those genial gentlemen who can scarcely be ruffled by trivial annoyance. The Silverseam colliers, in their rebellion, had vexed his soul, but not worried his equable temper. Now he became taciturn, preoccupied, and almost testy, even with Egeria.

The old servants saw that something had chafed their master, and probably jumped at the conclusion that the disturbing cause was some care connected with the property. Whereas the marquess’ feelings were wholly disinterested. What could be done? To tell Sir Richard what he had heard, or to allow him to visit at Hurst Royal on his usual footing of intimacy, while this frightful blot was on his fair fame, seemed equally objectionable. What, indeed, was to be done?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIRST SHADOW OF THE TERROR.

LADY EGERIA FITZURSE was alone in the great drawing-room at Hurst Royal, in the same spot, and nearly in the same attitude, as when first introduced to the reader. This time, however, she had not the listless air which she had then worn. On the contrary, her heart beat with quick throbs, and there was an unusual tinge of color in her beautiful, calm face, for she was looking forward to an interview that could scarcely be devoid of some anxiety and pain. It was now two days since the letter from India—the letter of Lord Alfred, her cousin—had reached Hurst Royal.

The marquess had at length confided to his daughter the care which had of late embittered his very life, generally so free and joyous ; and, to his great relief, Egeria had taken what he considered the sensible view of the affair. She was quite sure of Sir Richard's innocence. She was equally sure that it was impossible to let so atrocious a rumor pass unnoticed. It was surely right to inform the young baronet of the malicious stories afloat. And when the marquess demurred, Lady Egeria volunteered, so to speak, to bell the cat, and agreed to be the one who should communicate the unwelcome news.

Sir Richard was expected at Hurst Royal. The marquess had sent him a note inviting him to take luncheon there at two o'clock. "We have no party, and shall be quite alone, but shall be much pleased if you will come to us," had been Lord Cheviot's written words. The acceptance had been unhesitating. Sir Richard was, indeed, in the seventh heaven of delight. It was the first time, intimate though he was at Hurst Royal, that he had been asked to come there quite alone. That Lady Egeria was relenting towards him was, he thought, more than probable.

Now he began to hope that the wind had changed, and

that there was yet a prospect of bringing home so noble a bride to Greystone. She had forbidden him to renew his suit, but ladies do not always like their prohibitory behests to be obeyed. He trusted that after luncheon he might find an opportunity of bridging over the chasm that separates the friend from the lover.

In this frame of mind he rode over to Hurst Royal, sprang lightly from his horse, and tossed the bridle to the groom. It seemed to him as though he were walking upon air ; and when he was announced in the great drawing-room, he appeared so elated and so pleased that Lady Egeria eyed him with a sort of surprise.

There was not, at first, time for much speaking. The marquess came bustling in, with outstretched hand and short, jerky speeches, very unlike his usual serene utterances. But Sir Richard, intent on his own hopes and projects, scarcely noticed the confusion in his noble host's discourse.

During luncheon the nervous uneasiness of the marquess was so marked as to cause Sir Richard more than once to look at his distinguished entertainer with surprise, wondering what could have occurred. He was himself in the highest spirits. Never had Lady Egeria known him to be so talkative, so blithe and amusing. His gay good-humor seemed so spontaneous that she could not help recalling to her mind a north-country superstition that she had learned in childhood from her Scottish nurse, and which had reference to those who were "fey," or unnaturally excited and joyous, just as the Angel of Death had marked them for an early doom.

Luncheon over, Lady Egeria again took Sir Richard's offered arm, and led the way to the drawing-room. The marquess did not follow. So soon as she had resumed her seat, Lady Egeria turned her clear eyes full upon the young man's face, flushed with excitement and anticipated triumph.

"I have something to say to you, Sir Richard, that costs me much to say."

The words, unwillingly uttered, fell from her lips like so many drops of frozen hail, and chilled, somehow, the glow of hope within the listener's bosom. He bowed silently, and waited to hear more.

"You have been asked here to-day, Sir Richard, because

evil rumors are abroad, and must reach, one day, the eyes or ears of all who live around us, and which have reached us already. My father was unwilling to speak, and so, as I stand pledged to be your friend, I have taken it on myself to tell you what we have learned, leaving it to yourself to act as you think best. I trust you will credit me with kindly motives."

Sir Richard's flush had given place to a sickly pallor. Again he bent his head in silence. This, then, was the reason for that invitation which he had hailed as a sign of relenting towards himself and his suit. It was to break bad news to him that he had been asked to Hurst Royal.

"Papa has had a letter—which I will show you, if you please—a letter from India!"

"I thought as much!" exclaimed the baronet, and then bit his lip savagely, for he felt that he had damaged his cause by the tell-tale speech. What he thought was that the truth had come out about some of the shady antecedents of the triumphant Zenobia, and that he was about to be reproached for having persuaded the marquess and his daughter to act as social sponsors to the widow of an opium smuggler and the descendant of a race of dancing girls.

"I mean," he said, hastily, "that I have little cause to love that country, or to expect any good from it, as you know."

"I do know," replied Lady Egeria, softly and sorrowfully. Then she resumed: "I find, Sir Richard," she said, "that the task I have taken upon myself is harder and more distressing than I thought it would be when I was rash enough to undertake it. Yet I must speak out. You have enemies, it seems, in India, and things are laid to your charge that it seems shocking even to think of. I need not say that we, your friends, do not believe the scandalous accusation that some people at Futtehpore and elsewhere, are—I fear, Sir Richard, you are ill!"

His face was almost livid now, and his hand was pressed upon his heart, while his eyes were dilated and fixed, and his white lips gasped for breath. By a mighty effort he seemed to shake off the symptoms of emotion, and said, as steady as he could.

"It is nothing—only surprise. But I should like to know the worst."

"You had better, then, read the letter at once," she said, as she unfolded it and held it out to him. He took it mechanically, but with fingers that quivered like an aspen leaf, and began to read ; but the characters placed upon the paper swam before his dazzled eyes, and it was not at once that he could grasp the meaning of the words. Presently, however, his hand ceased to tremble, the color mounted to his face, and when he had completed the perusal of Lord Alfred's epistle he rose from his chair an altered man. His eyes were bright ; his look high and proud.

"What infamy !" he exclaimed ; "what baseness ! Lady Egeria, do not mistake me !" He made haste to add, "To your cousin, the writer of this letter, I impute no blame. He has but echoed the lying report of my defamers. But I could find in my heart to start for India this very night that I might drag into the light of day these busy-bodies who have dared to blacken my good name."

He was very much in earnest now ; his voice was eloquent with honest indignation, and there was a sad dignity in his bearing that made him, in Lady Egeria's eyes, more like his brother than she had ever seen him look before. She put out her hand to him, in a generous impulse of sympathy.

"Dear friend—Sir Richard," she said, "papa and I knew and felt how false must be this story from the first."

"False, indeed !" he repeated, eagerly. "Why, Lady Egeria, will you believe that I never, to my knowledge, even saw this man whom they choose to say I—murdered ? The name he bore : what was it ? Travers—Travis—yes, Walter Travis—is as strange to me as his face would have been. I knew nothing of him. I gather from the letter that he was one of those raving Europeans who, in India, always seem more or less under a cloud, and who are put to strange shifts for a livelihood. Sometimes they get ill-paid work to do in what is called the Uncovenanted Civil Service ; sometimes are employed in a printing office or an indigo plantation ; and at other times they worm what they can out of rich natives, or hang about some mosque and barter their religion for a pension of a few rupees. The company of adventurers of that sort I always shunned, though I have known the colonel admonish some of our subalterns who had thoughtlessly picked up acquaintances of such a kind. And why should I, of all men, be

taxed with the death of a fellow to whom I never spoke is inconceivable."

"The man, it seems, had been in the service of the Rajah Amarat Rao, whom I believe you knew," said Lady Egeria.

"Of the Rajah—of Amarat Rao," said Sir Richard, in an altered voice. And he again glanced at the letter which he still held in his hand, "Ah, yes! Amarat Rao, the Rajah—strange—most strange!"

He allowed the letter to fall unheeded on the floor, turned his face towards the window, and for a time stood mute and motionless. Then he groaned aloud, and when he turned again towards Lady Egeria, she was moved to pity as she saw how haggard was his face, how wild and wan his eyes, as of one who sees before him a spectre.

"I am quite unmanned to-day," he said, hoarsely, "and hardly know how it behoves me to act. But at any rate, Lady Egeria, you may assure the marquess that I shall not rest until I have cleared my reputation from the slander which——"

"Which none who know you, none who owe you a debt of gratitude, as we do, can for an instant fail to disbelieve," said Lady Egeria, loyally, as she, too, rose from her seat since the baronet had turned towards the door, and seemed about to go. His horses, according to previous orders, had been already led round, and the stamping of their iron-shod hoofs was audible on the gravel without.

"I thank you," he said, sadly, and with a sort of humility that contrasted oddly with his late fearless look and bold denunciation of his nameless accusers. "This has come upon me very suddenly," he said in the dull, monotonous tone of a sleep walker, "and I must have time to think over the course I ought to take—time—"

As he spoke he dropped into a chair, hiding his face with his hands, and seemed oblivious of the presence of Lady Egeria, whom he had left standing near him. She respected his grief, and remained silent, and presently the young man rose, reeling.

"Forgive me—forgive me!" he exclaimed, with a ghastly effort to smile, but not attempting to touch Lady Egeria's offered hand. "But I must go now, for this maddens me. I must be alone."

He staggered from the room as he spoke, and from the

house, crossing the wide hall with a halting step, and mounting his horse slowly and wearily to ride home.

Sir Richard went back to Greystone in a very different state of mind from that in which he had left it, buoyant and light-hearted with hopes renewed, for, whatever might be the nature of the load upon his conscience, at least his love for Lady Egeria was sincere and deep. Now those hopes were crushed, utterly crushed, and in their stead a nameless, haunting fear had taken possession of his soul, and threatened to weigh him down. Brave as he had often shown himself to be when confronted by mere physical peril, he quailed now at the shadow of the terror that he knew was sure to dog his footsteps at the last.

CHAPTER XX.

JASPER FINDS HIMSELF RETAINED ON BOTH SIDES.

AGAIN did Sir Richard Harrington find himself alone in the abbot's parlor, and present library, at Greystone. It was the morning of the day on which he had been invited to Hurst Royal, and had learned from Lady Egeria's lips what scandals were rife concerning him.

He had passed a miserable night, weird dreams alternating with feverish unrest. His scarcely-tasted breakfast over, he went to the liqueur stand on the sideboard, and tossed off three successive glasses of Chartreuse to steady his nerves, and then repairing to the library, began to pace the floor with quick, impatient strides. The news he had heard had nettled his temper, while conjuring up before his mental vision a dismal prospect of coming ill.

A flush of wrath rose to his cheek, even now, as he thought of the land he had left, and how, at tiffins and tea parties, his name was probably bandied about from lip to lip, coupled with nods and innuendoes. He had been popular, but nothing is more evanescent than a popularity founded on no more stable basis than a fair face and pleasant manners, and he was assured that already a verdict had been given against him by many who were ready to believe anything against the absent.

"I know some harridans there," he muttered to himself,

“who delight in tearing a reputation of man or woman to tatters. And my being rich, and with a handle to my name, will only help to procure a verdict, socially speaking, of guilty, with aggravating circumstances. What am I to do?”

It was a question easier asked than answered. His impulse, in the first moment of anger and surprise, had been to start for India; there to silence the tongues of back-biters. That, on second thoughts, appeared Quixotic and useless. To preserve a dignified composure, to ignore the story, and live it down would probably have been the advice of some very phlegmatic, not to say cold-blooded, councillors.

But so passive an attitude suited ill with his sensitive nature, nor was he certain that it would be in accordance with the dictates of common prudence. Was there no middle course—nothing between inert quiescence and hurrying back to Futtehpore? He had acquaintances in abundance at the place that he had left, but no friend on whose discretion he could trust. Nor was he known to any man of business residing in India, and on whose good offices he could rely.

“I think I have it!” Such was Sir Richard’s soliloquy after more than half-an-hour’s deep thinking. “Yes, that will be the best. The man is, no doubt, somewhat of a knave, but his wits are as sharp as a razor, and in this case, the knave’s services will, by the tie of his own self-interest, be secured to me. India, of course, will be a novelty quite out of the routine of his regular experience, but from what I have seen of him he is just the man to adapt himself in a moment to new ways and new conditions.

Sir Richard was pleased with himself, and glad to have puzzled out the expedient which now seemed to him as a plank of safety whereby to bridge the dangerous chasm that yawned beneath his feet. There was, however, in his opinion, no time to be lost. The Marquess of Cheviot was not the only neighbor who might have correspondents in India, and accusatory rumors have a knack of flying from land to land, and of spreading broadcast over the country. He must act at once.

On this occasion, Sir Richard did not choose to ride. He ordered round his high tandem, with the two fast-stepping greys that had been Sir George’s usual equipage

when he went on wheels, and had Morris and another groom, with folded arms and cockaded hats, sitting behind him as he drove over to Wortham.

Many, no doubt, who saw the mail *pnæton* flash by, with its silver-mounted harness, well-bred horses, and liveried servants, were disposed to feel a little mild envy of the young and handsome man who held the reins, while none could guess the dark and desperate thoughts that passed successively through his busy brain.

The Rose and Crown, old-fashioned inn and posting-house, where coaches changed their teams, and yellow traveling chaises with "first turn out" of nags and postilions, were in requisition, was still the True Blue Hotel, patronized, especially at election times, by the *élite* of the sport of the county, and to the Rose and Crown the master of Greystone drove accordingly when he entered Wortham. He even lingered there to exchange a few words with chatty, buxom Mrs. Brooks, the middle-aged landlady, who was proud of knowing the names, ages, and number of the children of those landed gentry who were her chief supporters, and who really seemed to take a sincere interest in Miss Edith's engagement to the captain and Master Edward's promotion in the Foreign Office. And he called for some sherry, which he did not want, and sipped it, and praised it, before he left his horses and servants to rest and refreshment at Mrs. Brooks', and strolled off on foot into the town. For was it not well, just then, to win over to his side all tongues that he could?

The same spirit actuated Sir Richard when, as he approached Mill Lane, towards which he had taken a somewhat circuitous course, he saw the lad, Jerry, who had held his horse on the occasion of his first visit to Mr. Holt's office, furtively eyeing him from the opposite side of the narrow and grimy street, but without any overt act of recognition. No one else was in sight, and Sir Richard paused and beckoned. The gesture was of the slightest, but the boy came shambling across the street in a moment.

"Glad to see, Jerry, that you have a good memory," said the baronet as he slipped half-a-crown into the ready hand that clutched it eagerly. "One day, perhaps, I may find a job for you that will bring you in more than this. 'Till then we are strangers as before."

Jerry grinned assent as he pocketed the coin. "I'm

fly, governor," he made answer in a low voice ; "and I'm game—late or early, town or country, 'tis all one."

Then, seeing a dismissal notified by a nod, the lad touched his cap with a dingy forefinger, and shuffled round the corner in an instant. A minute later, and the baronet was at Mr. Holt's door, and had stretched his hand towards the bell pull. He was spared the trouble of ringing, however, for at that moment the green door was noisily opened, and a rough-looking, loud-voiced man emerged, smiting his spurred riding boots with his loaded whip, and talking of horses, splints, spavins, and "good for a cool hundred pounds at the Assoizes."

Behind this talkative client appeared the dark head and over-bright eyes of Jasper. "Good-day, good-day, Mr. Hatch !" said the lawyer, cheerily. "We'll work to windward of 'em, never fear."

And then, when the clanking spurs and heavy tread of the local horse dealer had ceased to echo on the pavement, he bowed civilly to the baronet.

"Quite at your disposal, Sir Richard," he said, and led the way into his narrow and untidy office. It cost the master of Greystone some embarrassment to make the nature of his business clear, but at last the awkward subject was mooted, and Jasper's teeth and Jasper's eyes seemed to glitter with redoubled brilliancy as he listened. There was a sort of half-suppressed sense of enjoyment in the expression of the Wortham solicitor's face as he heard the baronet out. Then came a pause.

"You forget, Sir Richard, that you have not yet told me what you would have of me ?" said Jasper, softly.

Sir Richard winced.

"You are right, Mr. Holt," he said, with an attempt to laugh, "and I was wool gathering, I fear, and had better come to the point at once. I have come here to ask if you will consent to act for me, and to go out to India on my behalf."

"About this business?" purred Jasper, showing his white teeth again.

"About this business, of course !" replied the owner of Greystone.

Jasper picked up the office ruler, and meditatively tapped his shining teeth with the end of it, while eyeing the baronet, for a full minute, in silence.

“Ahem !” he said, after this interval for thought. “It is a far cry, as our Scottish neighbors say, to India, Sir Richard, if you will excuse my reminding you of the circumstance, and quite, therefore, out of the usual beat of a professional man.”

“And therefore, Mr. Holt, such a piece of service should be handsomely remunerated,” was the baronet’s smooth response. “I propose to offer a thousand pounds, over and above all traveling expenses and incidental costs, for the loss of your valuable time, should you feel willing to oblige me as I have suggested.”

“Well, Sir Richard,” rejoined the lawyer, dubiously, but with twinkling eyes, “such a journey will entail some inconvenience, and be hard to reconcile with my duties towards ordinary clients. But I feel the very great importance, to yourself, of this affair, and am not insensible to the compliment involved in your confidence, my very dear sir. The object is, I think, to trace out the truth, is it not ?”

“The object is to silence lying tongues !” said Sir Richard, almost fiercely. “Track, if you can, these villainous stories to their authors, and confute them. Learn, if you can, the actual whereabouts of this fellow Travis, who may be, for aught I know, in Calcutta, or at Singapore, while supposed to have died at Futtehpore, and offer rewards by advertisement in the Indian newspapers, native and European, and set spies to work. All this will cost a good deal of money ; but of money I shall not be sparing. Now, Mr. Holt, if you accept the mission—and I read acceptance in your look—when can you start—to-morrow ?”

The Wortham lawyer made a wry face. “Short notice,” he said, “but I am so desirous to meet your wishes, Sir Richard, that I will undertake to set my regular business in order, and go up to London to-morrow by the night mail, and thence to the place of my destination as fast as steam can hurry me there. I will, if you will allow me, draw up a short paper, authorizing me to act for you, if you will be good enough to sign it. That will suffice for my credentials, he ! he ! he !” And, tittering at his own thoughts, Jasper took a pen and began to write. The memorandum that he drew up was terse and clear, so that

the baronet, after glancing it over, signed it without demur.

"And, ahem!" said the solicitor, coughing expressively behind his broad hand. "As to the sinews of war, Sir Richard?"

"I had not forgotten that," replied his titled client, taking out his pocket-book, and producing from within its leaves three slips of paper, which he laid upon the office desk. "Here are three cheques, made payable to your order, and each for two hundred and fifty pounds. Should more be wanted, more, of course, will be forthcoming. This is a subject on which I feel very deeply, and I grudge nothing to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion."

Jasper's eyes glowed as he swept into his pocket the gold-compelling oblongs of paper.

"Right you are, Sir Richard," he rejoined, "and it is a pleasure to deal with a gentleman who has so keen a sense of what it is best to do. Liberality—judicious liberality, like yours—is seldom thrown away. Whereas, I have had monied clients who really seemed to expect an agent to fight the Battle of Waterloo, as it were, without powder and shot. Yes, I'll take these with me, and, of course, account for them afterwards. I am to be freehanded, am I not, when I get among our dusky fellow subjects, yonder?"

"Certainly," said the baronet, twisting his moustache with a thoughtful air; "and remember, Mr. Holt, that you are going to a country where perjury and fraud are rank, and where false witnesses start up like mushrooms after rain whenever there are a few rupees to be made by crooked statements. You will be surprised, I think, by the amount of fiction that will greet you when you commence your investigations."

"We have some hard swearers in England," coolly replied Jasper; "and my experience of horse chanters and hokey-pokey shipowners, as they are called, at Coalport and Rockhaven, will, I daresay, enable me to understand, when in India, the working of the native mind. You shall hear from me as early as I can get upon the track of the missing man—Travis, I think you called him, Sir Richard—yes, Walter Travis," continued the lawyer, consulting some hasty notes.

"Please also to bear in mind," said the baronet, earnestly,

“that another inquiry, undertaken, I fear, in a spirit hostile to my interests, is going on, and that your path may cross that of the enemy.”

Jasper's teeth and Jasper's eyes flashed forth intelligent appreciation of this warning, and he chuckled audibly. “The parties you speak of, Sir Richard,” he said, confidently, “will have to get up very early in the morning before they weather upon us, forewarned and forearmed as we are. In these cases the victory is commonly to the sharpest wits, especially when backed by the longest purse, eh, Sir Richard?”

“The purse shall not be lacking, and the wits, Mr. Holt, I can trust to you to supply,” rejoined the baronet, gloomily, for Jasper's merriment was out of tune with his own highly-strung nerves. “But I will thank you to remember that this is no joke to me.”

“Indeed not,” chimed in the lawyer, suddenly becoming as grave as an owl. “Murder, Sir Richard, or the imputation of it, is always a serious thing, and a good deal may be said, too, about defamation of character. Swinging damages, if the law of libel be the same as with us, would surely be granted by any court, if——”

“Not for a moment to be thought of!” interrupted Sir Richard, frowning. “The object is to crush down these vile stories, not to trumpet them forth to the world by the help of paid advocates of the press. When first I heard the tidings my impulse was to hasten back, and to check such tattle—by the pistol if necessary!”

Jasper pursed up his lips and shook his shaggy head. He had not a high opinion of the duel as a mode of whitewashing a blackened reputation. “Couldn't fight through such a wasp's nest as that, Sir Richard,” he said, decisively.

“I suppose not,” answered the baronet, with a forced smile, “and will, therefore, leave the matter to your care and skill. Let me have a word by telegraph—from Brindisi, or from Egypt, as you choose—since I shall be glad to know that you are well on your way. And, if you wish to talk to me again before starting, I shall be at home all day to-morrow, till after seven o'clock, at least, for I have to dine at Old Court. Now I will shake hands, and wish you a good journey and success.”

Left alone, the lawyer sat for some time rubbing his

broad hands together, and smiling at his own thoughts. Then he slowly rose from his chair.

"Why, Miss Mavina," he exclaimed, "this serves your interest, and mine, too, for the matter of that, as well as if our friend yonder, with the bloody hand in his escutcheon, had chosen to play our game for us. It is not every day," he added, slapping the pocket that contained the cheques, "that a man finds himself retained professionally, on both sides, as it is my luck to be !"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ANNUAL HUNT BALL.

It was a foggy evening in November—it was, indeed, the second of the month—and Zenobia Stone's carriage was rolling smoothly along from Saxham Towers towards the Town Hall of Wortham, where, as usual, the Annual Hunt Ball was to take place.

Some ten days previously she had received a card of invitation, whereon figured the names of stewards and lady patronesses. In the latter list the name of Lady Sparkleton and Lady Egeria, in the former that of Sir Richard Harrington, were included.

Many other carriages freighted with company were wending their way towards the same goal that night, for the Annual Hunt Ball was an event in the somewhat monotonous life of the grandees of the county.

Their own social gatherings, their picnic and parties, had, no doubt, the charm of exclusiveness ; but there is a sameness in meeting always the identical set of people and discussing the identical topics, and the Hunt Ball, like a race or a review, afforded neutral ground whereon those born in the purple might for a time share their enjoyment with others differently circumstanced. There was just sufficient difficulty in getting vouchers to enhance in the eyes of outsiders the privilege of breathing the same air with local magnates, and not enough to keep out any one of tolerable station.

Wortham was justly proud of its Town Hall, an edifice that had been built in those magnificently corrupt, old

Tory times, when unreformed corporations, chosen from among the leading families of the place, often did not know what to do with the public money which they handled officially. Sometimes such funds were spent on feasts ; not seldom they were jobbed away for the private benefit of the handlers and their kith and kin ; now and then they were more righteously laid out on schools or bridges

The Wortham ediles had been lavish as to brick and mortar, and there, as the fruits of their liberality, stood the big Town Hall, a world too wide for the every-day needs of the borough, but admirably adapted for an occasional assemblage such as the Annual Hunt Hall.

Upstairs there was a very large room, with ever so many windows in its imposing frontage, and a fine stuccoed ceiling that had resounded to the din of many fiddles, and the echoes of Kentish fire and loyal after-dinner songs, in the old war time, when Mr. Pitt and the squires and the upper *bourgeoise* of England were bidding defiance to France and democracy, and discontent with things as they were.

What banquets had been held in that great room, what bumpers of port and punch tossed off in wassail to "Great George, our King, the Heaven sent Prime Minister, and the Worshipful the Mayor," and what dances had taken place on that floor in those days of high prices and large profits, it would be hard to chronicle. At any rate there was the room, ready for use when wanted.

It had been prettily decorated now—the huge room ; perhaps more tastefully than had ever been the case in the feasting, frolicsome period of the long French War. There were many flags, well grouped, and greenery and hothouse flowers, and gleaming stars, formed of bayonets from the volunteer armory, on the walls ; and the music gallery had its rails draped with bright-colored silken festoons, while the lighting was incomparably better than anything that our grandfathers and grandmothers, used to enjoy themselves by the poor twinkle of a handful of wax candles, ever saw.

Some handsome furniture had been lent, too, by the owners of mansions near Wortham, and in the supper room downstairs the display of silken and velvet couches and sofas and lounging chairs was really notable. Then, too, there were more flags and flowers, and green, glistening leaves that made the bare cold walls assume the

aspect of some sylvan bower, relieved here and there by patches of rich color and flashes of steel.

Here, at long tables, constantly replenished with fresh wines and viands, was spread a supper that was to last till the close of the entertainment, for in that northern shire there lingered some traditions of the boundless hospitality of the past, and there was no attempt to put off hungry dancers with light refreshments and a scrambling skirmish among stinted chickens and fast-vanishing sandwiches, as is too often the case at a subscription ball.

Zenobia, with her jewels and her rich attire, that set off her voluptuous style of beauty better than a simpler dress could well have done, made her entry with some *éclat*, and caused quite a flutter of excitement among the many who knew the Begum of the Towers only by report. Her rubies, her pearls, her diamonds, large as they were, were magnified by the imaginations of those who elbowed their way forward to peep at the Oriental stranger, until her splendor swelled to proportions that would have graced the Court of Aurungzebe himself. And a murmur of genuine admiration for the good looks as well as the precious stones followed her as she went, and sounded musically in her ears, for she was far from indifferent to the popular verdict. Her place, however, was among the social Brahmins at the upper end of the great room, which she reached, leaning on the arm of handsome Harry Redmayne, whom the white satin rosette on his coat pointed out as one of the stewards.

The Begum was very well received by the local dignitaries of both sexes. Times were changed since first, to please Sir Richard Harrington, the marquess and his daughter had undertaken the troublesome task of introducing her. She had been taken in amongst the initiated, and was duly recognized by those who held the keys of society. And she had been lionized for her own sake. No party was held complete unless the beautiful Zenobia were numbered among the guests; and the lady from India had eaten the salt, as it were, of many who had not the slightest suspicion of her own dubious antecedents or the queer origin of her wealth.

That the heir of Old Court admired her—too much, perhaps, for his own peace of mind—was pretty patent to all shrewd observers. He was a steward, but he shirked his

duties, on that night, in the most graceless way, to hover about Zenobia Stone, and to be her devoted cavalier.

There were other stewards, of course, to supplement the deficiencies of the guardsman. The cavalry garrison of Coalport had sent every available officer to the Wortham ball, and two of them—Major Vere and Captain Paget—wore the white rosette. So did Sir Richard Harrington, whose careworn young face, and the look of anxiety that he vainly strove to banish, seemed out of place in a ball-room.

The Marquess of Cheviot was present, of course, and so, equally as a matter of course, was old Sir Simon, the M.F.H., to whom dancing appeared in the light of violent exercise for lunatics, and who eschewed balls as a Turk shuns pork, but who made it a rule to attend this particular festival of Terpsichore in a new scarlet coat, lined with white silk, in honor of the noble science of fox hunting.

The master was not the only wearer of scarlet. Other "pink" coats appeared, here and there, among the dancers, for now legitimate hunting had begun, and the previous day had been chosen for a lawn meet, at Hurst Royal this time, at which there had been also a sumptuous breakfast and a great muster of equestrians.

Sir Richard had been there, had ridden through the run, on his vicious horse Mayfly, so dashingly that he would have won the brush had not brush giving been obsolete, and so rashly that wise heads were shaken and predictions muttered that if the young master of Greystone did not succeed in breaking his neck, at any rate the fault would not be his, so perversely did he seem to pick out the most dangerous places and the biggest jumps.

That Sir Richard should, in the midst of carking cares and ever-present anxiety, have sought a little unwholesome excitement at the risk of broken bones might well be credited by those who saw how vainly he tried, in the Town Hall of Wortham, to seem in tune with the holiday scene around him.

He was not one of those who fly to the bottle to drown care. When he drank, it was to steady his nerves in some moment of emergency, but wine afforded him no glow of even temporary pleasure. Danger—physical danger—did so, and hence his desperate performance in the hunting

field and his preference for the vicious Mayfly to the merely hot-tempered Wildfire. Luckily, when a horse is vicious, he almost always possesses sinews of steel, and not seldom a catlike agility in difficult places, and the baronet's chestnut hunter accordingly came back safe and sound after a furious course across country that made oldsters stare, procured a paragraph in the county-newspaper, and elicited from Sir Simon the pithy comment of "Mad !" uttered as a stage aside. Now Sir Richard had a look decidedly hangdog, and his forced smile, when he did his best to feign the unconcern he could not feel, was almost ghastly.

Mavina Malstock sitting, under her father's chaperonage, in a corner of the great room, eyed the baronet balefully, and yet with a stealthy glance of half-suppressed triumph. Never, since that unlucky episode of the ruby ring and of Lady Sparkleton's interrupted song, had Sir Richard spoken to Miss Malstock. He had encountered the doctor's daughter, thanks to Lady Egeria's good offices, at more than one party, but had only acknowledged her presence by the most formal of bows.

Now he saw her well enough, but refrained from any open act of recognition. He did not in the least connect her image with that of his own agent, Jasper Holt, now active on his behalf in the East, but he had a bitter remembrance of the scare she had, perhaps unwittingly, given to him on the occasion of the dinner party at Hurst Royal. Even to Lady Egeria, whose haughty loveliness contrasted strongly with the Oriental beauty of the Begum, the baronet could find but little to say, and still more difficult was it to be properly polite to the exacting Lady of the Towers.

Once Zenobia, passing under escort of Harry Redmayne, tapped Sir Richard on the arm with her fan.

"You have never even asked me to dance !" she murmured, softly, but reproachfully.

"I cannot dance to-night. You forget that I am a steward, and am worked to death !" he answered, with a feeble laugh.

Perhaps his avoidance piqued the Begum, for she certainly smiled encouragement on the heir of Old Court, on whom the duties of his stewardship sat very lightly indeed.

"That young Redmayne, any one can see, is hard hit !" was a remark not infrequently made by outsiders ; those

lookers on who proverbially see most of the game. And it was quite true. The gay guardsman, who had waltzed and flirted heart-whole through successive London seasons, was seriously enthralled now by the Circe of Saxham Towers. He was almost ostentatious in his attentions. He even, though with some trouble, persuaded the Begum to be his partner.

"I seldom dance," she slowly lisped out, and with a look that spoke volumes; "seldom, and only with my particular friends; but if you really wish it—"

Zenobia danced well when she chose, swimming through the waltz in a dreamy, voluptuous style quite her own, and she and handsome Harry made a showier pair than any other there. As the music ceased, and the various couples moved away, the Begum again had an opportunity of accosting Sir Richard.

"I must speak to you," she whispered; "I must—and I will. Come to me, presently, when the next dance begins. You will find me in the supper room."

Sir Richard could but acquiesce. He waited until the orchestra began once more to play and a quadrille was forming, and then went down to the pretty refreshment room, where eating, drinking, and flirtation went merrily on, and where, among the flowers and flags and dark-green shrubs, sat the magnificent Zenobia, with subjugated Harry Redmayne at her side, and toying with her diamond-mounted fan. The baronet, with his pale, sad face, came slowly forward like a criminal, who awaits sentence.

How does a woman—a clever woman of the world—get rid of a man? Their sex, I suppose, confers on woman some instinct which enables them without offence to banish an admirer. Harry Redmayne did not in the least take umbrage when dismissed for the time being from his attendance on the Begum, so confidential and flattering was the manner of his dismissal. And then, the guardsman having gone off with a light step, Sir Richard, whose heart was anything but light, took his vacant place.

"What have I done?" said the Begum, softly, swaying her fan to and fro. "And why are you so changed? All this evening you have avoided me."

This was so palpably true that the baronet was almost ashamed of the trivial reply, as to his labors as a steward, which rose to his lips. Zenobia smiled somewhat scornfully.

“The good folk at Wortham must be complimented, Sir Richard,” she replied, “on the conscientious care with which you discharge the duties of your office. Let that rest ; more important matters have to be spoken of. A good deal of time has elapsed since first I asked you for an answer to a question plainly put and still I am waiting. Is it to be peace or war? Are we enemies, Sir Richard, or are we to be the best and dearest of friends? You have had leisure, surely, to make your mind up on that point.

“I can but wish, can but hope, always to be reckoned when you count your friends,” was the evasive answer.

Zenobia’s short upper lip quivered a little, and she beat her foot upon the floor. “Do not, I advise you, try my patience too far!” she whispered, angrily, but with caution, for just then a laughing couple, fresh from the dance, passed close by. She waited a moment, and then resumed : —“There was a promise given in India—a pledge, as you remember well. I still press for your answer, as to whether you choose to keep that promise, or to break it and take the consequences of your perfidy. I, at least, am not reticent, Sir Richard.”

“Nor will I be so with you, Zenobia,” he replied boldly, and lifting, for the first time, his eyes to meet those dark, lustrous ones of hers. “I should not have been silent so long—I should not have delayed speaking until you urged me to reply—but that I am—in trouble!”

He lowered his voice to whispering pitch as he pronounced the words, and now there was in his tone a ring of truthfulness that brought with it conviction, while the Begum, for the first time, noticed how haggard and thin was the baronet’s young face, and how sad was the look in his eyes. His evident unhappiness touched some hidden fibre of softness in her wayward heart.

“Poor boy—my poor Richard—you look wretched and ill,” she murmured, with a gentleness rare in her ; “why do you not confide your trouble, whatever it may be, to me?”

Sir Richard Harrington saw the momentary advantage that he had gained. His voice, when he spoke again was less steady than before, but more winning in its melancholy persuasiveness, while he looked down as if admiring the flowers in the splendid bouquet that lay beside Zenobia where she sat.

“My trouble, my unhappiness,” he said, in his low, rich tones, “relate to India, and have caused me much thought and annoyance for several weeks. It is too momentous a subject to be talked of here, at a ball ; nor, Zenobia, can I well bring myself to explain it until it be decided, one way or another, for good or for ill. Suffice it that such has been the reason for my silence.”

“Were I your wife, to share your sorrow and your joy,” she whispered, as she slowly manipulated her jewelled fan “would not your lot be less lonely?”

She bent her beautiful eyes on him with all their lustre as she spoke ; she was so near that he could distinguish the faint scent of the perfume on her raven hair ; the great rubies of the bracelet that clasped her rounded wrist flashed like red flame as she waved her feathered fan to and fro. Seldom had he seen her look so tempting in her Oriental loveliness. But he had now a talisman against her charms, and the old intoxicating influence of her presence had lost its power over his senses. Yet he felt himself constrained to dissemble, to juggle with words, to gain time at any cost. It was a part, he knew, unworthy of a man, and he despised himself for playing it ; yet he had no choice, so he deemed. Again he raised his mournful eyes to meet hers.

“How could I say what is on my heart,” he replied, with sad earnestness, “weighed down as I am by this load of cruel cares ? If those who seek to injure me were to triumph, I should be a broken man. How, then, could I reconcile it to my honor to ask you to link your fortunes with those of one who may live to see his friends shrink from him, to bear, however unjustly, the world’s blame, and to wander alone, like Cain, over the earth ? The thing would be impossible. No. I have sent a sure emissary out to that—to that country whence we both came ; and trust that I may yet be able to get the better of the malignity of those who would—but enough of this ! Give me a little more time, Zenobia, for your own dear sake. Be patient with me. I cannot answer now.”

Zenobia ceased fanning herself. She bent forward, and touched his hand. “I will be very patient !” she murmured ; “I did not know of this—my poor boy !”

But, at that moment, up came pink-faced Lord Sparkleton, more florid than usual, in consequence of supper and

champagne, to claim some implied promise that the Begum would dance with him—"it's only the Lancers, you know!—and Zenobia was, perhaps, not sorry to conclude a conversation that had become embarrassing to both of those concerned in it, and to go back to the ballroom, leaning on the peer's arm.

After this, nothing worth chronicling occurred at the Annual Hunt Ball at Wortham.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH JASPER RECIVES A VISIT.

IN a large, ill-furnished room in the bungalow at Futtehpore, which did duty for an inn, and was kept by an Armenian indifferently well versed in English requirements, Jasper Holt sat in the dusk of the evening, writing at a clumsy table of saulwood by the light of a large lamp. The lawyer's face, now browned by the sun, expressed doubt and discontent, and, indeed, he had repented, more than once, of undertaking an errand which as yet seemed fruitful of little except heat and dust and flies, petty hardships, and unmeaning gossip.

The bugles and trumpets at the far-off cantonment had sounded their evening call, and the sun had gone down, but even at that season there was a stifling stillness in the air. The hot winds that swept across the sandy plain to northwards had ceased to blow, but no refreshing breeze stole through the moistened tatties or window blinds of sweet-smelling grass, and only the monotonous flapping of the punkah kept up the slightest movement in the heavy and oppressive air.

"Yes, it was worth while coming here," growled Jasper with a snort of disgust; "to breathe the vapors of this oven of a climate, to be stung by mosquitoes, poisoned by the cookery, and scorched by the sun, just for this. It seemed, at first, as if I stood to win, but now——"

He broke off here, for at this point the waiter, a Portuguese from Goa, entered to say that his worship the Kot-wall was without, and desired to know if he could be received by the sahib from England.

“Show him in,” rejoined Jasper, gruffly, and soon the functionary in question, half major, half commissary of police, came waddling and panting into the room, and with salaams and polite speeches, took the seat that Jasper somewhat ungraciously indicated to him.

That the visitor wished to be civil was plain enough. He had left his slippers without, and there was a conciliatory smirk on his fat face, supremely sly withal, above which towered aloft the green turban of a Hadji. His white garments were of fine quality and spotlessly clean, and in his crimson shawl girdle he wore a jeweled dagger in a sheath of embossed silver.

“Well, Mustapha, what is your good news?” demanded Jasper, a little hope rising in his heart, for the official’s self-satisfied air boded well; “no more put-offs, eh?”

“No, Sahib Holt,” replied smoothly, and in quite intelligible English, the smiling visitor, whose name was Mustapha Khan, and who, Hadji though he was, was the reverse of a fanatic; “this time, I think you will admit that you have money’s worth for your money. Since I saw you, I have worked, I and my police, for your sake, like greyhounds slipped upon an antelope. Not a pedlar not a chapman, not a robber rascal in the Bazaar but has been sifted and winnowed like grain to find out what he knows, since who can tell, Holt Sahib, what oyster may contain the pearl of truth?”

Jasper was not much given to Oriental imagery. He shrugged up his shoulders impatiently. “I should like,” he said, bluntly, “to get something more for my rupees than mere lies, which are as abundant in this country as the gnats and the dust, friend Mustapha.”

“Plenty kidmut—plenty what you call fiction—about we may be sure, Holt Sahib!” said the corpulent Kot-wall, with a leer and a grin; “but at last we have found a clue. There are witnesses forthcoming who can vouch for a quarrel having taken place with violent words and mutual threats, between a young officer of the cavalry regiment—Barchiwallahs, as we say—Lancers is your English word—lately here, and another European, not in your Queen’s pay. That is something, Holt Sahib!”

“It would be of great importance if it did not stand alone, retorted Jasper. “What we want, however—my employer and I—is a chain of facts, all bearing on the same subject.”

"I can forge the chain link by link," confidently replied the chief of the police, "and prove that the young officer was the Ric Sahib Harrington, as you call him, well known here. Score one for that," he added, lifting his fat forefinger to emphasize his meaning, "and then go on to say that I can prove the other Englishman to have been a Feringhee named Travis, once a dependent on our lord the Rajah: two points here, Holt Sahib!" and up went a second finger as he spoke.

"I admit that, if you can furnish evidence that the altercation occurred, and with some result," said Jasper, eagerly, and with brightening eyes.

"I have witnesses to more than I have said, Holt Sahib," rejoined the smiling Kotwall; "witnesses who can show what came of the dispute, and how it ended, and what burden it was that lay on the Ric Sahib's mind when he went back to England to claim his father's rank and lands. But it is hot, still weather, and I have had a long walk, and a thirsty, parched feeling is in my poor throat and makes talking difficult."

Jasper must have had some experience of his friend Hadji's foibles, for he promptly took the hint and rang the bell to give the necessary orders. The Portuguese waiter as promptly obeyed the summons, and brought in a tray with bottles and glasses. The solicitor at once filled up two tumblers with claret, being careful to add a glass of pure brandy to that destined for his Moslem guest.

"If you insist, Holt Sahib!" sighed the Kotwall, "and since the Koran permits us to take what is good for us—in the name of the Prophet, then!" And he tossed off the deep draught of forbidden liquor with the ease of a practical toper. The effect was to make his sloe-black eyes dance and twinkle with satisfaction, and to loosen his tongue.

"I cannot, in my position, as you may easily imagine, Holt Sahib, often indulge," said Mustapha Khan, regretfully. "Not that our lord, Amarat Rao, is a true believer or strict about wine as it behoves a believer to be, but ill-natured tongues will wag, you know, and we have some sour zealots at the mosque, whose ill word might have weight at the palace should scandal ensue. It is only when I visit, as now, a Feringhee gentleman like yourself that I permit myself to yield to temptation. What was I

saying? That the Rajah was an infidel dog—no, not that!” he added, in some confusion, “but that I had to be careful as relates to wine. I have been to Mecca, you know, and have tasted the water of Zemzem, the sacred well—and very muddy it is, by-the-bye—and so have a reputation for holiness to keep up. But I weary you with my babble, Holt Sahib, and I feel, besides, that this visit has been a long one. Come to me to-morrow at my poor house, where I shall be proud to receive you—say two hours before noon, when I shall have finished with the wretches in court, and when there will be space to interview the witnesses before the noontide meal. And if you are not satisfied then, Holt Sahib, I will not accept a single anna, not so much as a pice, of the present which I know your munificence, and also your sense of justice, will induce you to offer. And now I must crave permission to take my leave.”

“I will be with you to-morrow, friend Mustapha, at the hour you name,” said Jasper, now quite restored to good humor by the prospect that he fancied he saw opening out before him. “My landlord here keeps a trap that I have hired more than once, since I am not seasoned to the Indian sun, and I assure you I know how to be liberal when I feel that it is not a ‘pig in a poke’ that I am asked to buy, you understand.”

Mustapha Khan was not well versed in English proverbs, nor did he probably much relish the mysterious allusion to the unclean animal, but he continued to smile as he rose salaaming to his slipperless feet. However, he accepted a second glass of wine dashed with brandy before he departed, and when Jasper shook hands with him something like the chink of golden coins resounded from within the Kotwall’s palm, and then he went, and the Wortham solicitor was left alone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNFAIR DEALINGS.

ON the morning of the day succeeding that of the Kotwall's visit to the dawk bungalow, Jasper Holt arose in excellent health and spirits, and with more appetite for the breakfast he had ordered than he had felt since his arrival in India.

The meal was a copious one, and good of its kind, with its various curries, from bobochee to the fiery "allblaze," compounded of the most delicate game birds and the hottest condiments, its pilaff, roast quails, grain-fed mutten, and slices of a noble mahseer, the fish which in India does duty for a salmon, cooked in buttered paper, and done to a turn. The coffee was fragrant, and the pale ale as clear and sparkling as liquid amber.

Jasper, as he finished his repast, felt as if he were fairly satisfied with himself and with the world. And yet he was playing a base and treacherous part, if viewed from an impartial standpoint. It was on Sir Richard Harrington's account, ostensibly, that he was a temporary sojourner in India. It was the baronet's money that he was spending, lavishly enough, for he had drawn again upon his titled employer since his arrival, and yet, as might be gathered from the drift of his conversation with Mustapha Khan, every step which he took was distinctly hostile to that employer's interests.

Some men's consciences seem seared or blunted, and to this category must have belonged that of the shrewd lawyer from Wortham, for he still regarded the fact that he was in the pay of both parties and had Lady Egeria's purse to pull upon for the expenses of the inquiry, as well as that of the luckless Sir Richard, as a most exquisite joke. Which way his bias went was made plain enough by his soliloquy, when he had stepped into the rickety carriage which his Armenian landlord kept for hire, and had set off for the town, attended by two running footmen

in the minimum of clothing, and armed with sticks for the stimulation of the lean horses which were harnessed to that vehicle.

"How many years is it, I wonder, since old Sir George horsewhipped me for shooting a rabbit in his park? I was boy then, but I can remember how I ground my teeth and swore to be revenged one day. I think that day has come now: I have no cause to love the name of those stuck-up Harringtons."

Presently the creaking carriage was threading the streets of the dirty native town, where, as usual in the East, high blank walls, which shut off courtyards or gardens, alternated with rows of thatched huts or tumbledown dwellings built of mud and laths, and anon with some huge mansion, the solid stones of which defied decay, although the flat roof might be crumbling to ruin and the gaunt windows stand open to the bat and owl. At the opposite end of the so-called bazaar stood the house of the Kotwall, at the gate of which, so soon as the rumbling of wheels announced his approach, Jasper found the worthy magistrate awaiting him.

"I will not ask you to enter my humble abode, Holt Sahib, though your shadow on its walls would honor it much," wheezed out Mustapha, with a bow, "but will, with your permission, act as your guide at once. Just now, if you will leave your carriage here until your return, we shall stand little chance of meeting military gentlemen in the town."

Jasper assented, and the pair of confederates set out together on foot, followed by two peon of the Rajah's police, armed with sabres and carrying long sticks with which in case of need to clear the way. They plunged into the network of narrow lanes, and soon reached a sort of square, in which stood conspicuous a brick-built tavern, over which floated the Union Jack, and which had red curtains to its glassless windows, while various inscriptions, such as "bar" and "billiards," figured on painted boards affixed to the walls.

"This is kept by a Parsee from Bombay, who knows English customs," remarked the Kotwall; "and under his roof occurred the quarrel between the two Feringhees that led to so much. It is a quiet time here, and we can have our chat unobserved."

And, indeed, on entering the tavern, which seemed deserted, no one was to be seen except the yellow-capped proprietor, a swarthy little man, clad in black broadcloth, who came out from behind his jars and bottles to greet them with greasy civility.

“May you be prosperous, worshipful Kotwall!” he said; “servant, sir!” this to Jasper. “We want a talk with you, Tribobjee!” said the Kotwall, patronizingly, and the landlord at once assented, and led the way past the outer bar, in which there stood a piano, near which the half-caste barmaid, dressed in tawdry finery, was asleep in an American rocking chair, into the long and empty billiard-room, littered with half-burnt ends of cheroots and dirty glasses and black bottles.

“Here we can be as quiet, gentlemen, as in the caves of Elephanta!” said the Parsee. The conversation that ensued was business-like and to the purpose, and was, for Jasper’s benefit, conducted in English. The tavern-keeper readily stated that he had a perfect recollection of a vehement dispute one evening in early June, between a young officer of the lancer regiment in camp, and a regular frequenter of the establishment, whose name was Travis, and who was a hanger-on of the Rajah’s, though not always an inmate of the Palace. The altercation was about a trifle, an alleged foul stroke at billiards, a game at which Mr. Travis was notoriously skillful, and his winnings at which were reputed to form part of his precarious income. Hot and bitter words and taunts had been used, and threats had followed, and a personal encounter had been prevented only by the interposition of some of the company. Then Mr. Travis had uttered some words amounting to a challenge, to which the officer, whom Tribobjee declared to be Lieutenant Harrington, had made an answer which the marker of the billiard-room had afterwards taken down in writing. If the Kotwall pleased, the landlord would bid the barmaid call her brother, the marker, and tell him to bring the memorandum alluded to.

The Kotwall nodded assent, and the Parsee left the room, and soon reappeared, accompanied by a shabbily-dressed young fellow, whose complexion of pale bronze pointed him out as a semi-European by descent, and who came in yawning and rubbing his eyes like one just awakened from sleep.

"Poor Thomas cannot lie down, mostly, Master, before dawn," said the Parsee, apologetically for his drowsy subordinate. "Now, Thomas, you tell gentleman about row here between the Ric Sahib and Travis, and what you heard them say."

Thomas, the half-caste, made a statement tallying in all essentials with that of his employer, and exhibited a tattered memorandum book, in which were pencilled the following remarkable words, averred to have been uttered by Lieutenant Harrington, in the presence of several persons, and addressed to Mr. Walter Travis :

"If you can get anything in the shape of a gentleman to bring your message, hang it I'm your man !"

Questioned as to who, besides himself and the landlord, heard these words, the billiard marker shook his head.

"Two—three officers, but I only remember name of one—Mr. Graham of the Lancers. Then there was a railway surveyor or two, and a gentleman from Bombay, Harrison they call him—and the manager of a coffee plantation, up country—and a clerk in storekeeper's office—yes, and old Sergeant Bunce of the Resident's horse-police."

The landlord and the marker both expressed their perfect willingness to depose formally to the truth of their statements before the British Resident or any other authority if necessary, and both manifestly expected to be paid for their pains, and this Jasper at once promised, adding a retaining fee of a couple of gold mohurs for the Parsee, and a ten rupee note for the Eurasian, to his recommendation to preserve silence until he should call for their evidence.

"Now, Holt Sahib," said the Kotwall, triumphantly, when they were once more in the street, "have you not had money's worth for your money this time? But, come with me, and you shall hear more."

They next entered a narrow and crowded street, where the sticks of the peons were used to drive away indiscriminately the swarming tawny children, the gaunt pariah dogs, and the roving "bazaar" pigs that contended with the snarling dogs for any offal in the rubbish heaps, and reached a native dwelling rather cleaner and larger than the hovels they had passed.

Here a man, decently dressed and able to converse in broken English, received them cringingly, offered them

wooden stools to sit upon, and told the following story:—He, their poor servant, Govind by name, had been one of the personal attendants—valet, in fact, or mussaulchee—of the Ric Sahib, Harrington. He recollected a stranger, a civilian, coming to his master's quarters in the month of June last, on some business not friendly. There had been raised voices and wrathful words. Govind could not understand all he overheard, but was certain that the Ric Sahib said, aloud:

“Then I'll meet him!”

The next morning, Lieutenant Graham, a brother officer, called very early at Harrington's quarters. He had a mahogany case under his arm. It was a pistol case. Of that, Govind was quite sure, for he saw the case opened, and caught a glimpse of the weapons inside. The Ric Sahib called for his horse. He and Mr. Graham went away on horseback, their grooms or syces running beside them as usual.

They went towards the jungle. Govind and the other servants thought it was to fight a duel with somebody, and were very anxious until their master came back. The Ric Sahib said nothing, and no inquiry, and no fuss followed. The syce, who had accompanied his master, had, of course, something to relate to the other servants when he got back.”

“But that would be hearsay evidence, and, in an English court of justice, null and worthless,” said Jasper, with some disappointment. The Kotwall laughed.

“Yes, Holt Sahib; but I have got the groom here. Call Kashti, and let him speak for himself, Govind Singh, will you?”

Govind picked up a brass basin that lay near him, and struck it three or four times with a short, heavy club, and in answer to the sonorous clang an active, dusky figure, scantily attired in white, came in on bare and noiseless feet, and lifted both his outspread hands to shade his eyes, in token of deference.

“This fellow speak no English—must talk through me,” observed the Kotwall, and proceeded to put questions.

Kashti, an ordinary Mahratta groom, stated, in his own language, that early on a certain morning in June he and the syce of Mr. Graham had waited with the horses on the edge of the forest, while the Ric Sahib and his friend en-

tered the jungle on foot. Graham Sahib had a case in polished wood under his arm.

The two officers were absent for some time, and the grooms thought they heard the faint report of distant fire-arms in the forest, but to this Kashti declined to swear. The grass-cutter, with his two boys, were in the jungle at that very time, and in that very part of it, cutting grass for their master's horses, as usual in India, and they more distinctly heard the shots. Curiosity had made the father creep through the bushes, and he declared afterwards that he had seen his master, the Ric Sahib, with a pistol in his hand, and had heard voices loud and eager. Then the timid creature's dread of the consequences to himself, should he be caught prying, had caused him to slink off unnoticed. He had told his sons, however, what had happened, and they, in their boyish inquisitiveness, and contrary to their father's wish, had stolen through the bush and seen their employer, Ric Sahib, with one or two other Feringhees, clustered round a prostrate figure on the ground. Then they, too, had been terrified into flight, and it was not until after Lieutenant Harrington had ceased to be their master, and had left the country, that they had ventured to tell what they knew.

"Hearsay evidence, this, anyhow!" grumbled Jasper.

But the Kotwall was equal to the occasion. He nodded to the groom, who at once turned towards the mat that hung across an inner doorway, and gave a long sibilant hiss like that of a serpent. Instantly there shambled into the room a scantily-clothed figure, nearly black, and with a strip of red rag twisted around his shaggy head, followed by another form, that of a barefooted lad, whose wild eyes peered forth from amidst the unkempt hair that hung over his low brow and dark face. These two new-comers had an abject air quite different from the deferential bearing of the Hindoos.

"That dog," said Mustapha Khan, contemptuously indicating the elder of the two, "was grass-cutter to the Ric Sahib. His name, which it defiles my lips to utter, is Puli Vang. He knows some Hindustani, but not much. Luckily I can talk his unblest jargon, not fit for a respectable man—a Bhula Admee—like myself."

Questioned roughly in his own dialect, the humble grass-cutter told his tale, which was translated for Jasper's bene-

fit. The Pariah lad, his son, whose name was Kishi, was next interrogated, and his statement, like his father's, agreed precisely with the version given by the Hindoo syce. His brother, who had also seen the Ric Sahib, was dead, he said, a month or more ago, of snake bite—a fact which the young barbarian mentioned with the utmost unconcern.

"These apes of the woods often die thus," remarked the Kotwall, coolly. "However, in your European courts, the oath of a Pariah is weighed with that of a Brahmin, so it is well to have these curs at call. Throw a few rupees on the ground for them, Holt Sahib, and let them go for the moment."

Jasper complied, and with muttered thanks the scattered coins were greedily snatched from the earthen floor by the man and the lad, who then shambled hastily away. Then the syce and the ex-valet received their fees, more civilly tendered, and next the Kotwall set off to guide Jasper Holt to the detached cottage in the outskirts where dwelt Sergeant Bunce.

The sergeant, a tough veteran whom forty years of Indian sunshine had bronzed to copper color, and whose moustache was as white as snow, gave brief and soldierly evidence.

"I served Her Majesty," he said, "many years before I came to command those blue Sowars of the Resident's here, and I respect the army. But some of these young officer chaps do carry on in a way that makes a fellow's blood boil, and I consider Mr. Travis, who was a decentish sort, had very great provocation, and Ric Sahib, as they call him, was as much in the wrong as ever I knew a high and mighty young chap to be. There was talk that meant a duel, if no worse ; and as for Mr. Harrington, I remember his words well enough, and would swear to them."

The words, when repeated, turned out to be identical with those noted down by the billiard marker, and Sergeant Bunce, too, pocketed a gold mohur in return for the information given. Then came the return to the Kotwall's house, and before Jasper stepped into his carriage, Mustapha Khan was remunerated on a scale that satisfied even him.

"I shall start for Delhi at once," said Jasper, decisively. "I think I shall be able to prove, not a *bonâ-fide* duel, but a rascally murder under color of an affair of honor ; but

first I must put pressure on this Lieutenant Graham, to induce him to confess his share in it, as an accomplice before the fact."

It never occurred to the Wortham lawyer, as he returned in his carriage to the inn to prepare for his journey, that he was himself a traitor, double-dyed, or that his dealings with his unhappy principal in England were, to say the least of it, false and perfidious. Flushed with success and hope, he scarcely paused to meditate on the morality of what he did.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE TRACK.

THE railways, a boon to pilgrims everywhere, are doubly so in India. Thanks to the geni of steam, Jasper Holt arrived in Delhi expeditiously enough, and without a tithe of the toil and cost which were exacted by the old plodding journey in palankins.

The Wortham lawyer was neither a sight-seer nor an archæologist, and cared as little for mosque and palace built by Mogul emperors in the palmy days of the Moham-medan Raj as for the modern glories of that splendid street, the Chandni Chonk, crowded with such costumes as are to be met with nowhere else in the Peninsula. His business was with the young officer who, there was every reason to believe, had been Sir Richard Harrington's second in the untoward affray, dignified by the name of a duel, which had taken place in the jungle near Futteh-pore.

"Once let me see him face to face. and if I don't wring the truth out of him, I wasn't christened Jasper, that's all," said the solicitor to himself, more than once, confident in his own powers of brow-beating or cajoling an unwilling witness. And then there was a potent engine of coercion ready to hand, in the shape of a threat, easily executed, to complain to the military authorities. Should the colonel be lenient, and the local commander-in-chief turn a deaf ear, there remained in reserve the Horse Guards, nervously sensitive to newspaper criticism, and unsparing whenever so small a sacrifice as that of a subaltern had to be made for the sake of peace and quiet.

But at Delhi Jasper Holt found a disappointment awaiting him. On reaching the quarters of the Lancer regiment, lately at Futtehpore, he was informed that Lieutenant Graham had been buried, with the usual military honors, but three days since, and that his effects, according to custom, had been sold by auction.

It was fever, the great scourge of India, and which lays low triple the number of victims who succumb to cholera, that had proved fatal to Sir Richard's former brother officer, who was now beyond the reach of all the pressure, legal and official, that Jasper could have brought to bear upon him.

Still, like a staunch bloodhound, tenacious in its quest of the destined prey, Jasper did not permit himself to be discouraged. With the auctioneer's help, he found out the names and addresses of the few purchasers of the late lieutenant's goods and chattels, and had, on cunningly connived pretexts, an interview with each of them, but without eliciting anything that could further the progress of the inquiry that he was conducting, at the expense, and for the ruin, of his too confident client.

"Look here, old chap!" said, at last, one vacuous and good-natured youngster, in foraging cap and gold-laced overalls, whom he found at the auspicious moment of imbibing a second foaming beaker of soda water and brandy, "any rubbish like books and papers, and so forth, would have been left out of the catalogue, as not worth knocking down to anyone, and so his servants—the black fellows, I mean—have either kept them or thrown them away. If they were kept, you'll get them for a rupee, don't you know?"

Jasper Holt took the hint, and with the aid of an English-speaking tout from his hotel, he diligently hunted up the ex-servants of the deceased officer. Money, as has often been remarked, will do almost anything with a native, and by the expenditure of some loose silver Jasper contrived to purchase several books, a battered writing-case, and other articles that had belonged to the late subaltern of Lancers.

The writing case contained, besides bills and letters, a thin flat book, inscribed externally, "Diary," while just within the binding was written the name of its owner, "Alexander Cochrane Graham."

The Wortham lawyer pounced upon this manuscript volume with the avidity with which a painstaking historian would unfold the pages of a newly-discovered chronicle. The entries were, as might have been expected, of a trivial character, for the most part, and wholly irrelevant to the purpose of the seeker; but presently Jasper felt that his studious pertinacity was rewarded, as his eyes lit on the following paragraph,—

“Futtehpoore, June 11th.—Was second to H. of Ours in his affair with poor Travis. Quite cut up about it. A blackguard business, for H. certainly did fire before the other expected it. Hushed up, but I have registered a vow never again to be concerned, as principal or second, in a confounded thing like that. Bad enough in any case, but this was sheer foul play, though I was weak enough to hold my tongue, more for the credit of the regiment than for H.’s sake, since he behaved shamefully from the first outset of the quarrel with Travis.—A. C. G., —th Lancers.”

“It seems to me,” observed Jasper, complacently, “as if my case was very nearly perfect now. This is even better than I thought. The writer of the diary has done me a good turn without intending it, and our mutual acquaintance at Greystone, by packing me off to India, has run his neck into a noose, if ever baronet did so. Let us see if the book contains any more confessions.”

But the diary, though scanned with jealous care, did not prove to contain another of those damaging entries. There was vague mention of duns and debts, of sporting expeditions, bets on races or pigeon shooting, of balls and moonlight picnics, and ever and anon some memoranda of another sort, such as, “Wrote to my mother and sisters,” “Another letter from dear Alice, with hair”—that showed some feeling for those far away. But that was all.

Armed with this piece of mute evidence, and with every prospect of securing the formal depositions of the living witnesses, Jasper Holt was sure that he should have a strong case against Sir Richard Harrington. That he should exult, as he did, in the anticipated downfall of a client who had trusted in him, was due, probably, to a mixture of motives hard to analyze. His old grudge against Sir George had perhaps kept up a smouldering enmity to the Harringtons which had been fanned into flame by his passion for Mavina and her strong suspicions against the

baronet. The episode of the ruby ring, and Sir Richard's singular behavior on the occasion of the dinner party at Hurst Royal, had been repeatedly discussed by Miss Malstock and the enamored lawyer, and seemed impossible to explain away. He, Jasper, did really feel sure that in being instrumental in bringing a criminal to justice, he was doing a good work, and his nature was not sensitive enough to revolt at the breach of good faith of which he was guilty. On the contrary, he still chuckled mirthfully when he reflected that the owner of Greystone Abbey had himself supplied the funds that were now being used to effect his ruin, and suggested the journey that was to prove fatal to him.

"I won't let grass grow under my feet," said Jasper to himself, as he took his seat in the railway carriage to leave Delhi for the south, "and shall book my passage, if I can, by the *Serapis*, which is advertised to sail, I see, on the 18th of the month. But now to work up this Futtehpore evidence to the best advantage."

He thought the matter out, step by step, in his own mind, and then, pillowing his head on his folded railway rug, sank into a quiet slumber.

CHAPTER XXV.

JASPER THINKS HIS EVIDENCE IS COMPLETE.

ONCE back at Futtehpore, and again installed in the rooms that he had previously occupied at the inn, Jasper's first care was to communicate with his ally, the Kotwall, who had promised not to be slack during his absence in carrying on the inquiry. And in return for the card, which was despatched by special messenger, the Wortham solicitor received within the space of a few hours the following note, in a cramped handwriting, but fairly legible, considering it was traced with a reed pen and in a foreign tongue by an Oriental accustomed to write from right to left only :

"HONORED SIR AND SAHIB,—Your poor and faithful servitor has done his best, since the light of your presence has been withdrawn

from us, to carry out your respected wishes. And by the blessing of the Prophet, this attempt has been crowned with success, and a new fountain of information has been unsealed, a source at which to slake your excellent thirst for truth concerning the grand business to which we owe your auspicious visit to India. To explain the purport of this within the narrow limits of this insignificant letter would be a task comparable to that of transcribing the Koran—may it be ever deemed holy ! in the compass of a nutshell or a datestone, but if I may have the happiness of being received by you at sunset this evening, I will bring with me a man who has that to tell which will enable you to set your foot, Holt Sahib, upon the neck of your enemy. In the meantime, I pray that your shadow may remain unaltered for many years, and that the measure of your prosperity may be, as our Persian proverb says, by the maund and not by the miscal.

“ The Kotwall of Futtehpore,
MUSTAPHA KHAN.”

“ This means,” said Jasper to himself, after a moment’s thought, “ that my Mahometan colleague feels a hankering for forbidden liquor, and desires me to stand treat, as before. Let that pass. The news he brings, if he do but make good his written pledge, would excuse his indulgence in a Red Sea of wine and brandy. A sharp fellow, this Mustapha, and would scarcely promise what he could not perform.”

And Jasper sent back a civil note to the effect that he should await, after tatoo, the pleasure of a call from the Kotwall.

At the appointed hour the Kotwall arrived ; this time mounted on a sturdy white pony, equipped with crimson saddle and embroidered housings, and having its mane and tail tinged with henna. He was escorted by four peons of the police under his orders, carrying lanterns and clubs, as well as the short curved tulwars that hung, by a red cord, at their backs, and accompanied by a native clad in simple white, and who, by his appearance, was clearly a Hindoo artisan or mechanic.

Mustapha left, naturally, his suite and his horse outside, but brought with him into the room the white garmented Hindoo, who moved with reluctant slowness, and trembled visibly when brought into the presence of a strange European.

“ Approach, Lashgar Vi, and fear nothing !” said the Kotwall, encouragingly, in Hindustani. “ Those who do my bidding, unless indeed they speak with a forked

tongue, are safe with me, and may bask in the sunshine of my protection."

"Is this the person—the new witness, as I suppose—mentioned in your letter, friend Mustapha?" demanded Jasper.

"He is," answered the Kotwall, as he settled himself among the cushions of a bamboo easy chair, "and a fish worth the netting. He is one of my sheep, you must know—out of gaol, I mean," he added, seeing that he was not understood.

"Sorry for that!" said Jasper, shaking his head. "It does so discredit the evidence, Mr. Kotwall."

Mustapha Khan smiled. "The source may be muddy, but the draught is good for thirsty lips," he said, figuratively. "If this man had not been under my thumb, behind the bars, I should not have been able to worm out of him what he knew, and of which a hint reached me from the spies we are obliged to keep among the prisoners. He is a coward, as you see, for he shakes like a dried palm leaf in the blast of the monsoon wind. But he is no regular thief—though he stole a silver lamp from a Baboo's house, where he was at work as a carpenter—and his character is not so bad that he cannot be believed on oath. I have promised him a remission of his sentence if he gives the evidence we want. Now, Lashgar Vi!" he added, changing his speech from English to the vernacular, "speak out, and do your utmost to satisfy this gentleman, and you may yet sleep beneath the chupper roof of your own thatched hut before the Festival of Siva comes round."

Thus stimulated, Lashgar Vi, timidly but intelligibly, told his story, which of course was translated by the Kotwall, and committed to paper by Jasper Holt. He was, he said, a carpenter, often employed by Europeans. Had worked for Mr. Travis, for whom, in particular, he made a camphor trunk or chest, such as is often needed on account of white ants and moths, to order. There had been a mistake about the price, and some demur about payment, but he had found Mr. Travis very good-natured and gentle; more so than some of the fine Sahibs. Had also repaired furniture for Captain Harrington, the elder brother, and had repeatedly seen, at his quarters, the younger, known as the Ric Sahib, who spoke Hindustani so fluently. Remembered the great epidemic of cholera.

It caused much work—coffin making. He, Lashgar Vi, was called suddenly one night to bring a wooden coffin to the bungalow of Captain Harrington. The servants were frightened, and he had helped to place the body in the coffin, and had thus forfeited his caste, and had to pay forty rupees and more to the priests in the temple to be purified, and to make a pilgrimage to Benares. Would have petitioned the Ric Sahib to have made up the loss of money and time to him, since it was in his service that he had defiled himself by touching a corpse, but he had left the country.

“This is not all, I hope, he has to tell!” remarked Jasper, impatiently.

The Kotwall answered by a negative shake of the head.

The carpenter went on, and that in a manner that at once riveted the earnest attention of the Wortham lawyer. The body, he said, which he helped to place in the wooden coffin, was, though clad in military uniform, not that of Sir Lionel Harrington. It was that of Walter Travis. Of the truth of which statement Lashgar Vi was as positive as of his own earthly existence.

Questioned, and Jasper, who now grew excited, plied him with questions, Lashgar Vi persisted doggedly in his almost incredible assertion. He knew the two Feringhees quite well, as he knew the moon from the sun. It was the body of his old customer and patron, Travis, not that of young Sir Lionel, that he had laid within the wooden shell made by his own hands. Of that he was quite sure.

Asked if he could account for the substitution of one corpse for another, he had nothing to suggest. Still, the fact was so. He had not seen Mr. Travis for some weeks before the night he saw him dead. The two young men, in height and in the color of their hair, were somewhat alike, but yet there was no mistake. It was the lifeless form of Walter Travis, not that of Sir Lionel, that the Ric Sahib had caused to be borne home and enclosed in a coffin.

“Then,” said Jasper, bringing his hand down upon the table with a sounding slap—“then the bringing to England of young Sir Lionel’s remains, and the fine funeral in the church at Greystone, were all a solemn comedy to throw dust in people’s eyes, and conceal a crime that we shall soon be in a position to prove. If ever there was a case of murder, this is one.”

So thought the Kotwall. Then Lashgar Vi, trembling, signed his written statement and was sent outside under guard of a peon of the escort, there to wait while Mustapha received thanks and praise from his European friend, and ended the interview by swallowing, as before, potations pottle deep of the choicest vintage in the cellar of the Armenian innkeeper, after which, making an appointment for the morrow, he took a ceremonious leave.

The two next days were spent in collecting the witnesses and in getting their depositions, in Hindustani and in English, formally taken in the presence of the so-called "Chota Sahib," or Resident's secretary, Mr. Ford, and officially attested by Colonel Tierney, the Resident. Then the witnesses received largesse for their trouble, and Mustapha, the Kotwall, was remunerated with a liberality which sprang not only from the fact that Jasper was in high good humor, but that he knew also that Lady Egeria's promise to Mavina to pay expenses would be scrupulously kept.

Then, with his valuable documentary evidence under lock and key, Jasper Holt journeyed from Futtehpore to Bombay, and when the *Serapis* P. and O. steamer sailed out of harbor, he was among her passengers, hurrying back to England on his mission of ruin and disgrace.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MISUNDERSTANDING.

A GLOOMY day at the Towers. It was about a fortnight since the *Serapis*, homeward bound from India, had passed Aden and steamed into the Red Sea, bearing with her Jasper Holt and his hoarded budget of accusatory evidence, and already the early touch of winter and the appearance of snow were beginning to modify the character of our English landscapes.

Zenobia looking forth from her window over the desolate garden and the leafless trees, shuddered, in spite of the fact that she was surrounded by every luxury and appliance that wealth could buy, and eyed the darkling scene without in a sort of dismay. She was wrapped in a large

Indian shawl of green and gold, and a great fire of blazing wood was crackling and glowing on the hearth, while heavy curtains screened the doors of the drawing-room, and in the halls and corridors of the old mansion huge stoves kept up a supply of heated air ; yet the mistress of Saxham Towers seemed to suffer from the cold, and her face wore an expression of almost sullen discontent.

The sound of wheels upon the crisp gravel without attracted Zenobia's attention, and was followed by the clang of the door bell.

"He has brought his answer, I suppose. It was like him to select such a day," she said, wearily. It was of Sir Richard Harrington and his promised visit that she thought, and that the subject was one that had grown distasteful or uninteresting to her capricious mind was evident from her look and tone. She brightened up, however, when her Oriental attendant glided in to announce Captain Redmayne.

Hospitality is yet among the cardinal virtues of that part of the North Country, and the Begum had, since the Hunt Ball, been a guest at many houses, at all of which the young guardsman had been the most attentive cavalier. She smiled now to see him, for this was the first time that he had paid a visit alone to the Towers ; but her womanly quickness of perception soon showed her that his face now wore an expression of seriousness, that was unusual, and that there was something of constraint in his manner that, to her fancy, augured ill.

Zenobia's spirits, suddenly reviving, were as abruptly depressed. Conscience—or in her case it might be more just to say imagination—made her prepare instantly to stand on the defensive. She thought that the future squire of Old Court had heard something either against her or her introducer, Sir Richard, and had come to tax her with dissimulation, or to ask her frankly if the flying rumor reposed on any solid basis of fact. Somehow, she winced at the idea of forfeiting the good opinion of this young man, more than she would have done had her social sponsors, the marquess and his high-bred daughter, turned their august backs upon her. The hand which she gave him was cold and not quite steady. Yet, as usual, the first remarks made were about the weather.

"How cold it is, and how dark !" said Zenobia. "I

am afraid to order out my carriage, and stay shivering at home. I never till now quite realized your terrible British winters. Do you know, Captain Redmayne, that, except at a distance in the hills, I never saw snow before to-day."

Harry Redmayne made some trivial reply. He, too, observed a certain change in the Begum's manner, and was at a loss to account for it. And then there was a long and awkward pause.

"I have not come here to-day, Mrs. Stone," said Harry, desperately, for he felt constrained to break the painful silence, "merely to pay a morning call. What I have to say has cost me many an anxious moment and sleepless night ; yet I must say it."

The Begum bent her head assentingly. Her heart beat as it had rarely beaten, in quick, irregular throbs. Her lips smiled, but she was far from being at ease. It could not, she thought, be that the guardsman had heard a report detrimental to her friend Sir Richard. Some inconvenient truth must have come to light as to her dubious parentage, her shady antecedents, or the queer origin of her husband's wealth. To lose some part of her borrowed plumage would be a bitter mortification ; to be stripped of all would be a death blow to her vanity. She grew pale, and shuddered afresh, as she drew the folds of the shawl closer to her shapely shoulders.

"I have come to say, Zenobia, that I love you better than my life—that all my hopes are centred in you," broke out the young man passionately, "and that, although I feel that I am not worthy of you—not clever, not particularly rich, and certainly not famous—I look forward to the hope of winning your dear love as never man yet did since the world was a world."

She turned her face away, as if to hide her blushes, but in truth she was confused, and nearer to hysterics than she had ever been before. What a revulsion of sentiment ! Here was this young man, handsome, well-bred, of old family and high degree, on his knees as her suitor, just when she expected to be questioned as to her mother the dancing girl, or asked whether the late Caleb Stone had really been the slave-dealing scoundrel that he was reputed to be.

She heard Harry Redmayne's voice still speaking, without being able to distinguish the words he uttered, and for

a few moments felt almost as if absorbed in a happy dream. Then she remembered herself and Sir Richard and her previous entanglement, and with a sigh she prepared to awaken from the happy dream.

"Captain Redmayne," she said, gently, turning her Cleopatra-like face towards his eager one, "you have surprised me—startled me—very much. It is, I know, a great compliment that you have paid me—the greatest in your power—and I thank you, but I must say no."

"But why 'no'?" asked Harry, whose countenance grew suddenly sad; "unless, indeed," he added, with, a searching look, "I am too late, and some other fellow, who may not be half so true as I am, has won your affections already."

This time Zenobia blushed as a girl might have done.

"Certainly not," she replied; and then again her color rose and fell, perhaps because of the falseness of her words, but so that in the guardsman's eyes she looked more bewitching than ever. She went on to tell him, in her rich, low voice, that it would be better, far better, for him to forget what he had just said: to think of her no more.

"I am older than you, you know, Harry," she said, lisping his name for the first time with a pretty timidity that belied her warning speech, "and am, besides, so new to English ways, that your own family might look askance at the idea of receiving me amongst them as your wife. And I am not sure that I could bear to live on in this cold England. I feel sometimes as if I should perish, like some bird from the tropics that cannot but die here of frost and hunger. And you have known me for only a few weeks. Better forget me, or only think of Zenobia as a well-wisher and a friend."

Then handsome Harry pleaded his cause with an energy and a command of words that surprised himself. He told her that this was no passing fancy. It was the heartfelt devotion of a life, a love that could come to no man more than once in his career. His hopes would be blighted, his spirit broken, if she continued to be cruel. He would not, he said, accept his dismissal so easily. The matter was one of great moment to him, because he loved her so dearly.

Zenobia was troubled and stirred to the very depths of

her nature ; all but frightened, too, at the fire and earnestness with which this young man spoke. She was used to young men and their lip service and compliments, and had been a sad flirt in her day. But never had she been addressed—most surely not by Sir Richard, whom she had entrapped into a declaration—in such burning words of sincere wooing as she had hearkened to that day.

It might have been better—it would, undoubtedly, have been more honest—had the lady of Saxham Towers said “yes” to her enamored swain. Perhaps she might, had not the worldliness that was inherent in her reminded her of Greystone Abbey and the great estates and great rent-roll, and all the mineral wealth underground as well as the broad acres of the Harrington property. Old Court was but a minor inheritance ; the Redmaynes, though so ancient a race, an untitled family. Personally, she very much preferred the gallant guardsman to the baronet, for whose sake she had migrated to England ; but she could not bear quite to renounce the notion of being Lady Harrington. But if she was not frank enough with her admirer to answer according to the promptings of all that was womanly in her heart, at least she ceased to say him ‘nay’ as positively as before.

“I must have time to think of this,” said Zenobia, in her turn craving for delay. “Your kindness, Captain Redmayne, was so unexpected, and has come so suddenly upon me, that I cannot, ought not, to be pressed to reply to-day—unless I am to adhere to my first ‘no!’” she added, half playfully, as her beautiful eyes swam in tears not wholly discreditable to her.

Of course, Harry Redmayne was in raptures. He had hope in his heart. He knelt and kissed her soft hand. She chid him gently, and bade him leave her now, and let her have time to think what would be the best and wisest for both. She was more than half in love with him herself, and this lent a new charm to her bright, dark eyes, a new witchery to her sweet, low voice. To fascinated Harry she appeared faultless as an angel ; far too good for him, as he in his simplicity opined. As he drove back in his dogcart that day from Saxham Towers to Old Court he was full of hope and confidence and admiration for the strangely-chosen object of his affections.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MAVINA'S STRATAGEM.

SHORTLY after Harry Redmayne's visit to the lady of Saxham Towers, Mavina Malstock, calling at the Wortham Post Office for letters, as it was still her custom to do, received one, bearing the London postmark, and which ran thus :—

“DEAR MISS MAVINA,—I have news for you which in one sense will be distressing and sad to you; still, I know that you will prefer to have your painful doubts removed; and I can only add that I fear—nay, I may say that I can with certainty affirm—that your worst suspicions are fully confirmed. There is now no doubt on the subject, Walter Travis was most foully murdered in India. I have patiently traced out every detail of the evidence, and have brought the proofs back with me to London. I think you can guess at whose door the guilt may be laid.

“Your presence, Miss Mavina, will be required, to give evidence as to the ruby ring you saw, and other suspicious circumstances. Have you any means of taking a trip to London—any friends to whom you could go there, and remain for a week or so, until the case for an official inquiry is settled? I must, however, caution you most urgently not in any manner to reveal the reason for your going to London, or even that you have heard from me.

“This is most important.

“But with your ready wit and cleverness, you will, I know, have but little difficulty in framing a plausible excuse for your journey to London; and if you can only find some relation or friend there to receive you, all will be well, and our chain of evidence will be, I think, complete. I write my address below, and will only add, *come quickly*, and let nothing tempt you to mention that you have heard from me, or one word of what I have communicated. I know that I can trust you in this, and I remain as ever,

“Dear Miss Mavina,

“Your faithful and devoted friend and admirer,

“JASPER HOLT.

“W— Hotel, Strand, London.”

As she perused this letter, Mavina's eyes flashed more than once, and her lips tightened ominously; signs of anger, not of grief, at this confirmation of what she had

long suspected. The girl had mourned in secret for her lost lover during weary weeks and months, but from the first she had cherished but faint hopes that Walter Travis might yet be numbered among the living. Now there could be no sort of doubt. He was dead ; he had died a violent death in that far-off land of India, and all that remained was to help in hunting down his murderer.

To some feminine minds such a task might have been uncongenial, even then. But Mavina was a good hater, and the prospect of vengeance was as dear to her as it is to some squaw of a Red Indian tribe mindful of slain kindred.

“He shall pay for this !” she murmured, with a vindictive glance in the direction of Greystone Abbey ; and then she thrust Jasper’s missive into her pocket, and went demurely home.

That Miss Malstock made no mention, in the domestic circle, of Mr. Holt or his tidings may readily be guessed. Nor was she at a loss how to act so as to comply with the summons she had received. Her first care was, on reaching her own room, to seize her pen and indite a letter, which she presently went out to post with her own hands, addressed to a certain Miss Crockford, of Cambridge Terrace, London, a former schoolfellow, on whose discretion and friendship she thought she could rely.

She was not mistaken, for on the morning of the second day, as the Malstock family were at breakfast, the postman’s familiar knock was heard, and the maid brought in a London letter, “for Miss Mavina, please”—a letter which that artless young person at once proceeded to open.

The contents, which Mavina dutifully communicated to her parents, were as follows :—

“MY DEAREST MAVINA,—You must have thought something had happened to me, it seems such *ages* since I wrote, but somehow I fear we London people are very bad correspondents. There are so many calls on our attention, and we are always putting off ; waiting till to-morrow. However, dear, I have not forgotten you, nor our happy days at Cavendish House, and I am writing now, with mamma’s full concurrence, to ask you to spare us a week or two at least, and come and visit us here. Laura is staying at our aunt’s in Dorsetshire, so you can have her room, and as there is always plenty going on, we would try to make your stay with us pleasant.

“Ask Dr. and Mrs. Malstock, with mamma’s compliments, if they will kindly let you come to us, and quickly—say to-morrow if you can

manage it—I mean the day after you get this—as there is a nice party coming off, and I should love to have you with us. You will find your room ready, and a hearty welcome. As I hope that we may so soon be together again, to chat over old times, I will not add more at present, but remain as ever,

“Dearest Mavina,
“Your very affectionate friend,

“JEMIMA CROCKFORD.

“*Cambridge Terrace, London.*”

This letter, duly read aloud in family conclave, was surely such as might well be written by an amiable young lady to the companion of her school days. What, however, Mavina preferred to keep to herself was a sly little postscript, lurking like a snake in the grass, beneath the seal, and which was as follows :—

“DEAREST MAVINA,—I have had your urgent letter, and I hasten to comply with your request, so I send by return the invitation as you wish. Mind you come. Is it *somebody* you want to meet? I am dying to know.

“Your attached,

“JEMMIE.”

This letter, luckily arriving before the doctor had sallied forth on his rounds, caused some debate in the family council—a debate in which Mavina’s part was a negative one, since she had only to sit passive and wistful while the discussion went on. Mrs. Malstock—mothers always incline to indulgence in such cases—was eager for her girl to get a holiday in London. The worthy surgeon was of an opposite opinion.

“Unless we find a gold mine in the garden,” he said, in his quaint way, “I don’t know, my dear, how Mavina is to manage this new piece of extravagance that you two seem to be bent upon. Journeys cost money; so do smart clothes and fallals and nonsense; and just now, too, when Christmas bills are coming in as thick as berries on the holly trees, I really don’t see how I can be expected to stand a fresh pull upon my purse—not a very full one, you remember.”

“I am sure,” faltered Mavina, looking at the tablecloth—“that if papa thinks it would be wrong—”

Here Mrs. Malstock came to the rescue.

“Why, Robert,” she said, with unusual energy for her,

"I am sure you would be the first to regret it if Mavina were to lose this treat, which might, you know, be so advantageous to her in after life. She sees no one here, shut up at Wortham, and I should not like the dear, patient child to be deprived of this opportunity of getting a glimpse of London gaieties. The expense would really be nothing—traveling is so quick now."

"Yes," answered the doctor, grimly "no question now, as when I was a boy, of two days and a night, with freezing feet and coat collar turned up because of the pelting snow and hail, miserably spent on the roof of a coach, before London was reached; or of riding there on horseback, with pistols in readiness, as my grandfather used to do. But if I concede the railway tickets, that won't be all. I shall be told next that Mavina wants an outfit, just as if she were going to Australia."

Mrs. Malstock, who saw that the victory was as good as won, did not draw the string unduly tight. She pointed out that Mavina's having been, thanks to Lady Egeria Fitzurse, present at sundry of the county gatherings that year, was fully equipped, so far as dresses went, for a short London campaign.

"A little pocket money, of course, the child ought to have, in case of wanting something," she pleaded; "these Crockfords are well off, you know, and go out a good deal, but a trifle would make all the difference."

"That depends on what you call a trifle," said the doctor, good humoredly.

However, it was agreed before Dr. Malstock set out in his gig to see his outlying patients, firstly, that the invitation should be accepted; secondly, that Mavina should go up to town on the morrow, since her schoolfellow seemed so impatient for her coming; and, thirdly, that so far as five golden sovereigns went, she should not be without means of providing what she might require in London.

Kind, motherly Mrs. Malstock seemed quite rejuvenated at the prospect of the pleasant little surprise that had befallen her daughter. She helped Mavina to pack, and hunted out from their resting places some queer old trinkets that she called her jewels, and which she had worn in her own girlhood, and before she bestowed her hand and the income of her modest fortune—it was but a poor two thousand pounds, strictly tied up for her child's ultimate benefit—on honest Robert Malstock, M.R.C.S.

There was something almost touching in the pride with which Mrs. Malstock drew forth from their wrappings of cotton wool and silver paper those antiquated ornaments—the pearls yellowed by age, the topazes, and Cairngorm brooches, and tarnished locket, and chains of filigree work from Genoa or Malta or Trichinopoly—each with a traditional history attached to it, each dating from the dead past. The necklace, with its clasp—“real stones, my dear, and, indeed, poor Uncle Joseph was too proud to have given me paste on my wedding day”—would do nicely for a dinner party, and then the pearl bracelet was the very thing, and that cross, a Maltese one, extremely handsome, only Mavina must take great care of it, and never wear it out of doors, because of London thieves.

With her own dresses, and a selected portion of her mother's gewgaws, it was considered that Mavina could figure creditably at whatever festivities she might be asked to. And of mild dissipation there was likely to be enough, for Mr. Crockford, who was a well-known Parliamentary agent, was rich, and kept his carriage; and his wife and daughters were supposed to see a good deal of society, in their way.

On the next morning, then, Mavina Malstock traveled up to London by the express, speeding along the iron way with a swift smoothness that contrasted oddly with her excellent father's vivid recollections of the self-same journey, painfully performed, in his own boyish days.

No event worthy of record occurred on Miss Malstock's commonplace journey, save that, at a junction where there was a brief halt, she found time to drop into the letter box marked V.R., a letter, addressed to “W—Hotel, Strand.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITH JEMIMA CROCKFORD.

BREAKFAST at Mr. Crockford's residence in Cambridge Terrace was a very different meal from that which went by the same name in honest Dr. Malstock's red-brick house in Crown Street, Wortham. There were, even in winter, brilliant **flowers on** the table, and a great show of silver,

or, at least, of electro plate, and a tall footman in a gaudy livery, like a macaw, stalking solemnly in and out, and fine new furniture, new stucco, new plate-glass windows, new frames to the pictures on the walls—pictures that were reputed to be old, and which, if you might believe their present possessor, had been bought at high prices, and would, in the course of a few years, be saleable for something fabulous.

A pompous-spoken man was Mr. Crockford as ever wore grey whiskers and rattled a heavy watch chain. Election matters, no doubt, he understood, for comparatively few of the M.P.s of his creation were afterwards ejected for bribery, and yet an immense deal of money must, in one way or another, have passed through his hands, and some of it, legitimately of course, had adhered to his fingers, for Mrs. Malstock had been accurate in saying that the Crockfords were well off.

Jemima's papa was not exactly an agreeable man. Perhaps a Parliamentary agent, who sees so much of human weakness, cannot always be that; but he was indulgent as a father, and not close-fisted as a husband. He gave good dinners, but was generally from home at other times.

Mrs. Crockford, who was tall and thin, an anxious-eyed woman with pretentious manners and a joyless little, cackling laugh, only seemed to exist to keep house for Mr. Crockford, and to chaperon her daughters. Of these, but one was at home, Mavina's former schoolfellow. Jemima, too, was tall, a silly, affected girl, with frizzled hair, overdressed, and with an overweening estimate of her own charms, which, to impartial eyes, were less perceptible. She was quite happy, however, for vanity enwrapped her like a mantle, whereas her far shrewder school friend, with her plotting brains, and dire resentment rankling in her heart, was less to be envied as she sat, smiling, among the strangers whose guest she was on the morning after her arrival.

Mr. Crockford had been the readier to sanction the invitation which his daughter had despatched, because Jemima had boasted pretty frequently of her schoolfellow's intimacy with people of higher rank than ever darkened the doors of the house in Cambridge Terrace, and with whose names Mavina's letters had made her familiar.

"This is a very different style of thing, of course, from

what Miss Malstock is accustomed to among her grand friends in the North," said the Parliamentary agent, with ostentatious humility, as he looked around at the evidences of wealth, or, at least, of lavish expenditure, by which he was surrounded. "Yet, you are welcome, young lady, to this poor abode of mine. Have you seen the Marquess of Cheviot and Lady Egeria Fitzurse very lately, may I ask?"

Mavina had seen these two distinguished neighbors very recently.

"I was at Hurst Royal last Wednesday, and stayed to dine there," she said, with perfect truth. She did not add that she had gone up to the mansion to tell her patroness how miserably hopeless she now felt as to the chance of Walter Travis being found alive, and that Lady Egeria, out of pure kindness, had insisted on her remaining for the eight o'clock dinner; but spoke as if such an attention on the part of her titled friends was quite habitual. And accordingly Miss Malstock rose several degrees in the estimation of the Crockford family.

"We can't, of course, pretend to keep pace with high flyers of that sort," said Mr. Crockford, again parading his fat humility; "but we will do our best—ahem!—Miss Malstock, to make your stay pleasant. I have met the marquess—a fine old nobleman—on business, with other members of the party, at the Palladium, which I daresay you have heard of?"

Mavina was too sharp-eared to be ignorant of the name of the famous political club—Pall Mall stronghold of those who thought as did the owner of Hurst Royal, and knew as well as Mr. Crockford himself how much was done there towards influencing contested elections.

"I have often heard the marquess speak of it," was her demure reply; "and Lord Sparkleton, too, is a member, as he told me the other evening."

"You are so dreadfully wise about politics, which are far beyond me, Mavvie, dear," giggled out Jemina, "that I shall be quite afraid of you before long. But isn't Lady Sparkleton a beautiful woman, and don't they admire her awfully in your part of the world, and do you think she paints—I don't mean as all society paints, you know, but real enamelling? I believe, for one, that it is sheer envy that makes people whisper such a thing."

"Hush, Jemima! you must not ask such home questions

about Miss Malstock's friends. I daresay it's all founded on ill-natured gossip, because her ladyship is run after as we know she is." protested Mrs. Crockford, with her artificial laugh.

Mavina declined to give a positive opinion as to the genuineness of Lady Sparkleton's complexion, somewhat to the vexation of her hostess and Miss Jemima, who had just seen that professional beauty in her carriage in the Park, but had read much concerning her in the society journals. Nor did she volunteer any statement as to her own acquaintance with the peeress, but allowed cross examination to elicit the fact that she had been present at the party at Barbury Court, which, as students of gilt-edged books of reference are aware, is one of the residences of the Right Honorable Marmaduke Algernon Rivers, Earl of Sparkleton, and had sung there, as had also the noble mistress of the house.

After this it was felt that Jemima's choice of a school friend had been judicious, and that Miss Malstock was in all respects a most creditable inmate. Then breakfast was concluded, and Mr. Crockford, as usual, went off in his brougham, with its high-stepping horses—bought from an unseated candidate at a moment of financial depression—to his office near Whitehall, and the visitor and the fairer members of the family were left to get through the morning as they might.

That Mrs. Crockford talked a talk as artificial as her laugh ; that Jemima chattered, and sniggled, and was full of innuendo and allusions, may easily be guessed. Also Mavina was asked to sing, and she sang in a powerful yet cultivated voice, such as, except in the case of a hired cantatrice who looked in at an evening party to earn her five or six guineas by a few bursts of Italian bravura, had never there been hearkened to.

And anxious Mrs. Crockford began immediately to plan an entertainment at which her daughter's dear friend, who was so intimate with Lady Egeria and the Countess of Sparkleton, should be the star of the night, and help to overthrow rival party-givers, such as Mrs. Brownrigg, and that Lady Gibbie, who gave herself such airs because of the defunct alderman's knighthood.

Presently Mavina made quiet mention of the fact that a friend—a gentleman—might be expected to call, about

twelve o'clock, and to inquire for her. Would it be inconvenient if she asked to receive him alone? Whereupon, with much giggling, Jemima Crockford made reply—

“To be sure, Mavvie—of course, dear; though it does sound so *highly* mysterious the very day after your arrival in London—does it not, mamma? But that is only my fun, you know; and I daresay you will tell poor Jemmie all about it. You had better see your visitor in the dining-room, which you can have to yourselves. No one ever goes there except papa, and he is almost always out, as to-day.”

At twelve o'clock the anticipated visitor knocked at the door. His card was brought up to Miss Malstock, who went down to the dining-room to receive Mr. Holt, sun-bronzed and with a sort of unhallowed triumph glittering in his overbright eyes and flashing from his white teeth.

“Glad to see you, Miss Mavina,” he said, effusively, as he took her hand in his, and held it for a moment. “I have called, as you see, in obedience to your commands. Your letter to myself bore the Middleton stamp. I suppose, Miss M., you posted it as you came along?”

“Yes, I did,” replied Mavina, gently but resolutely releasing her hand from his grasp; “and you see, Mr. Holt, that I have lost no time in following your advice. Here I am, and no one, not Lady Egeria even, has an idea of the real reason for my being here, in London. Is the—dreadful thing quite, quite certain?”

“Only too certain!” answered Jasper, shaking his head; “horrible as it is, the tidings I sent you are but too true. I, who have been tracking out the affair inch by inch, am of course more confident about it than it is possible that you should be, Miss Mavina. But if you will draw your chair a little nearer to mine, I will tell you, briefly, what I learned, at the cost of infinite pains and thought, out in India.”

And, lowering his voice, for he had no desire to be overheard, Jasper Holt proceeded to relate his Indian experiences, and to lay stress upon the proofs of the alleged murder. Mavina listened shudderingly and with downcast eyes. When she looked up again her face was paler than before, and bore the glistening trace of recent tears.

“My poor Walter!” she said, very softly. Her love for the penniless, homeless adventurer had been the one

noble and redeeming feature in her character—the one soft spot in her heart. Even Jasper respected the emotion that she could not quite repress. She did not immediately continue the conversation, but for some minutes averted her face, and was still. Then she turned towards the Wortham lawyer.

“It is a terrible piece of wickedness, from first to last,” she said, steadily, “and you have been wonderfully clever, Mr. Holt, to unravel such a tangled skein as patiently as you have done.”

“For your sake, dear Miss Mavina,” replied Jasper, admiringly, “I have worked out the case as I never worked before, with heavy odds against me. Yesterday I had an interview with the Public Prosecutor. To-morrow I go to the Home Office, by appointment. On Sunday, of course, nothing can be done, but on Monday I am to be at the office of the Treasury solicitors at eleven o’clock, and if you could do me the favor to meet me there, your evidence with regard to the ruby ring could be taken, to be laid before the authorities. It is for them to decide as to the inquiry for which I have applied.”

“I do not much like being mixed up in such matters,” answered Mavina, with some distaste; “but I will do what you wish, and more, to bring to justice the assassin of Walter Travis.”

Then Jasper gave her the address of the office in question, and a few more words were exchanged between them, and then Jasper Holt took his leave.

“I shall not call again unless something urgent occurs,” said the solicitor, prudently. “My coming here, were it repeated, might set afloat some report which might even reach our own neighborhood, and give the alarm prematurely. It will be safer to write.”

“I think so. It would be most provoking, after all our trouble, if he should escape,” said Mavina, with a tigerish gleam in her fine eyes.

“No, no,” returned Jasper with a chuckle; “our titled friend will not slip so easily, rely upon it, out of the net that is closing in upon him day by day.”

Then he shook hands with Miss Malstock and departed, and nothing worth chronicling occurred on that day, save that at dinner time, Mr. Crockford, who had been out all through the intervening hours, made some remark as to

Sir Richard Harrington's rent-roll, and the fact that two deaths of near kindred had suddenly made him what he was. "Unmarried, eh, Miss Malstock?" said the Parliamentary agent, with a leer that was meant to be arch, and Jemima caught at the idea which her father had suggested.

"We don't want to be inquisitive, Mavvie, love; but, oh! is he good looking as well as enormously rich, this gay young baronet, who, I daresay, is one of your beaux, if all were known?"

Mavina's eyes sparkled angrily at the mention of the hated name. But she answered, as unconcernedly as she could, that Sir Richard was thought to be good looking, but that her own acquaintance with him was very slight indeed. So no more was said as to the lord of Greystone Abbey.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT THE HOME OFFICE.

JASPER HOLT, though he had when conversing with Mavina expressed perfect confidence as to the result of his mission, was in his own heart by no means so sanguine of success as he had represented himself to be.

This was his first experience of dealings with the official world, and he felt himself, as many a better man than he has done, discouraged by the reception he had met with from those who are accustomed to view all subjects through official spectacles. It was not merely that he had been snubbed by messengers and hall porters, nor that his first written application for an audience had been evasively answered by the most flippant of clerks.

These things he had expected. Those who wish to gain Britannia's private ear must go through some ordeal, as did knights errant of old before they got into the enchanted castle, where, guarded by dragons and lions that rattled their chains and growled menace, the beautiful princess lay in magic slumber.

But when Mr. Holt's pertinacity had secured him a hearing, it chafed him to find that his story was received, politely indeed, but with a cold-blooded calm that savored more of caution than of enthusiasm.

“Under consideration !” he muttered to himself as he threaded his way along the crowded Strand. “How fond they are of that phrase, or any other that may act as a wet blanket ! There were understrappers, I suppose, attached to the Ministry of the period, who would have kept the Gunpowder Plot ‘under consideration’ until King, Lords, and Commons had been blown skyhigh by the help of Mr. Guido Fawkes and his dark lantern. But I suppose I must be patient.”

Jasper well knew, as he uttered these irritable words, that his best course was to be patient, and to pick his way to victory, with the aid of what he irreverently designated as Red Tape.

He had other courses open to him. An inquiry, if asked for in India, would no doubt have been conceded by the Viceroy ; and then if sworn information were laid before the magistrates of the county in which Greystone and Wortham were situated, The Bench could not refuse to take action in the matter. But then, as the sharp solicitor was aware, there would arise all sorts of difficulties as to jurisdiction and venue : there would be the maximum of scandal and fuss, the minimum of net result. Undue publicity, bungling decisions, perhaps partiality towards an accused Justice of the Peace for that very county, might lead to a judicial failure. The bird might elude the snare of the fowler, or, less figuratively, Sir Richard Harrington might fly beyond the limits of British jurisdiction.

“It would never do,” muttered Jasper, as he elbowed his way forward, “for him to be let out on bail and to break his bail, and get clear off, perhaps to some country with which there is no Treaty of Extradition. The loop-holes for escape are fewer than they were, but it is well to think of everything, if only for Mavina’s sake.”

The Wortham lawyer was as much attached to Mavina as it was in his nature to be. His admiration for her good looks was quite sincere ; but none the less was he bent on marrying her because he deemed that Mrs. Malstock’s two thousand pounds in Consols, which would eventually lapse to her daughter, would under his management prove the seed of a golden harvest. And he was quite sure that the way to win Mavina’s heart was to aid her in her revenge. This time Jasper, as having come by appointment, was regarded by the underlings of the Home Office as a bore

who must be tolerated. He had, of course, to kick his heels for some half hour or so in a waiting room of depressing aspect ; but then a young clerk came hurrying in.

"Mr. Holt?—thought so! This way, please. Mr. Lackerby can see you now."

And Jasper soon found himself in a room more comfortably furnished, and seated opposite to a large elderly gentleman, whose short-cut hair was crisp and grey, and whose steady eyes surveyed him from beneath beetling brows. This was Mr. Lackerby.

Mr. Horace Lackerby was one of those valuable public servants who are content, through a laborious life, to renounce laurels and the dust of the contest. He had been in Parliament, as a silent member who might be trusted to vote straight, but had given up the House to stick to the desk.

Official business was what he thoroughly understood, and what he lived for. For him, as he well knew, there could be no promotion beyond the grade he had reached. His chiefs, mere politicians, rose and fell with the Ministries they belonged to ; but he was as much a permanency as were the messengers, and his only ambition (as a neutral Under-Secretary of State) was to die in harness. Over and above his official salary, of secondary importance to one who had large private means, he had his reward in knowing how necessary a portion of the machinery of Government he was felt to be.

His chiefs, if famous in debate, were children as compared with him in their knowledge of the details that it takes half a lifetime to master, and constantly and very properly deferred to his opinion whenever left free to choose.

"Your request, Mr. Holt," said the Under-Secretary, looking fixedly at Jasper, and speaking in a dry, measured tone, "is receiving full consideration, I can assure you, in the proper quarter. You are aware, no doubt, that the course you have adopted is unusual?"

"The circumstances, sir, are unusual," answered Jasper, boldly ; "and authorize me, therefore, to aim high. It is better to do that than miss my mark."

"Perhaps so!" responded the official, softly, as he shifted the position of the heavy signet ring on his fat, white finger, and eyed the Wortham lawyer with a scrutiny

that was almost severe. "Perhaps, too, Mr. Holt, you prefer to set things in motion without yourself coming prominently forward at the outset of this affair?"

"Only," replied Jasper, promptly, "because I am afraid of a failure of justice if I take other steps, Mr. Lackerby, I give you my word. But for that, I should not trouble you, or waste my own time in London."

Mr. Horace Lackerby looked again, from beneath his cavernous brows, at the applicant, and sighed inaudibly as he perceived that the official camel must take on its back one burthen more. He was a gentleman and a man of the world, and had quickly taken the moral measure of Jasper Holt. The fellow was a bad fellow. He was a loud, impudent, coarse-minded knave. Out of his own mouth he stood condemned of treachery to his client—of double dealing and falsehood. He was too morally blind to see himself in the odious light in which he appeared to an experienced man of honor and trained intellect.

Mr. Lackerby was sorry to become, officially, a cat's-paw for the vengeance of such a one as the Wortham solicitor. Why did he not do his dirty work through the medium of police courts and the like?

But still, bad fellow or not, Jasper could not be sent empty away. Britannia could not refuse him a hearing, or turn him from her door, however repulsive he might be. The Under-Secretary had a fine instinct which told him, as an invisible familiar might have done, what could and what could not be effected by official discouragement. He felt half sorry for Sir Richard, of whom he had never heard until a day or two ago, as the unlucky target for the malignity of his hidden foes; but he was quite sure that to deny what was asked for would set a hundred pens and printing presses at work, and do as much harm to Government as to be out-voted on Supply.

"Very well, then," said the Under-Secretary, glancing at some papers which lay before him, and taking up a pencil; "we will, if you please, go through this evidence—copies of which I have here—and see what it is worth, so far as is possible at such a distance. You found the witnesses, if I understand you aright, through the help of your convenient friend, the Kotwall of Futtehpoore—not gratis, Mr. Holt, as I venture to suppose?"

"I had to grease his palm, pretty handsomely, too,"

rejoined Jasper, with cynical effrontery. "But I must say that old Mustapha gave me the value of my rupees, after all."

"Of Sir Harrington's rupees, we may say," answered the official, with a dry cough. "Well, what is the tale that these discarded servants, as they seem to be, have to tell? If you will allow me, Mr. Holt, I will run my eye quickly, again, over the deposition to refresh my memory."

He took up his gold-rimmed eyeglass as he spoke, and began to read. When he had finished, he laid the glass aside, and looked again at Jasper.

"A well-supported statement, I allow, if it will bear the test of cross-examination later on," said Mr. Lackerby, quietly. "There are witnesses and witnesses. You legal gentlemen, I believe, dislike those who, in the old phrase of the Bar, prove too much."

Jasper winced a little.

"The poor creatures," he said, half sullenly, "seemed quite convinced of the truth of what they affirmed on oath. And their depositions tally well with one another."

"They do," replied Mr. Lackerby, tapping the papers with his signet ring. "These natives of low rank, you are aware, lie like the Father of Lies. Not but that, in this instance, their assertions may be strictly accurate, or nearly so. Supposing there was a duel at all, Mr. Holt, and that the principals were Sir Richard and Walter Travis, what, I ask, makes us sure that the encounter was unfair?"

Jasper submitted that the entry in the deceased Mr. Graham's diary established that fact beyond reasonable doubt. "H. certainly fired first" were words not to be explained away.

"We must remember, too, that a fatal result to a duel is, in any case, murder in the eye of the law," said the solicitor.

Mr. Horace Lackerby shrugged up his shoulders as he gave a perfunctory assent to this doctrine.

"So it is," he said, slowly, "and very properly so. But public sentiment has to be reckoned with too. If the duel was really unfair—a mere colorable pretext for assassination—why, then, of course, Mr. Holt, the affair would assume a darker dye, and Her Majesty's Government would feel it a duty to provide for justice being done."

"That is all I ask—justice without fear or favor,"

responded Jasper, dauntlessly, and beginning to think that, in his own phraseology, he rode the winning horse. The official said nothing, but busied himself with penciling down a few marginal notes.

"The evidence of Lashgar, the carpenter," he said, suddenly, as he again glanced at the Wortham lawyer, "seems to have dropped in like a ripe plum, and very opportunely, Mr. Holt, during your short railway trip to Delhi and back?"

Jasper again submitted that there was nothing very extraordinary in the turning up of such testimony just then. The Kotwall, keenly alive to his own advantage, was, doubtless, ransacking every available nook and corner, with the aid of his police, for proofs that would be paid for. And his activity had probably been stimulated by the fact that Mr. Holt's departure from India was imminent, and that there would, very shortly, be nothing more to be got.

"It is refreshing," said the Under-Secretary, dubiously, "to talk to a practical man like yourself, Mr. Holt, who takes so common sense a view of matters. I dare say you are right, and that this excellent native functionary—what do you call him? yes, Mustapha Khan—did see the business in the same light as yourself. I think we have said, now, all that at present need be said. You have an appointment, I think, with the solicitor to the treasury for Monday next?"

Jasper admitted that this was so.

"And I have your address here," added the official, after a cursory examination of the bundle of papers, which had been tied together, by the way, not with red tape, but with narrow green ribbon, "and you shall hear the result of your application, which I shall lay at once before the Secretary of State very shortly. The legal aspects of the case have to be carefully studied, Mr. Holt, as well as the moral ones."

And then he nodded, and half rose, as Jasper bowed himself out.

"That fellow's company," said Mr. Horace Lackerby to himself, when the door had closed, "would be too bad for a hangman. But, such as he is, he must have his way, before he sets a score of newspapers baying at our heels."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN WHICH MAVINA PLAYS HER PART.

MAVINA MALSTOCK, domiciled for the moment with her new friends in Cambridge Terrace, was not allowed to find the time hang heavily on her hands. The Crockfords, mother and daughter, seemed bent on keeping their guest in constant motion.

The town mice felt, or affected, a fear lest the country mouse should be "moped to death" beneath their roof, and while deploring that Mavina's visit should not coincide with the glories of the London season, did their best to dazzle and distract her.

It was too wintry for the Park, but there were some few of the stock sights which rural cousins are traditionally supposed to enjoy, and which were new to Mavina. "They keep us so strict at Cavendish House, you know," to use Jemima's phrase.

The carriage, for there was a flashy looking carriage, quite apart from Mr. Crockford's useful brougham, was in perpetual requisition, and there was shopping, and there were calls, and afternoon teas, and a dinner on the Sunday at Lady Gibbes', where a place at the table had somehow been secured for Mavina, and there was talk of other festivities to follow, so that Miss Malstock began to wonder how she should find leisure for carrying out the object for which she was then in London.

However, when Monday morning came, Mavina, having a clear head and a strong will, managed to get clear of her too attentive entertainers, and to set off in a cab, and alone, "on business of papa's," as she unblushingly declared.

She gave the driver of the cab some vague address in Fleet Street, and it was not until she was far from Cambridge Terrace and inquisitive listeners that she altered her route, and bade the cabman drive her to the offices of the Solicitors to the Treasury, where she was to meet Mr. Holt.

She found Jasper, as she had rather expected him to be, awaiting her, on the pavement before the door.

"Glad to see you, Miss Mavina," said the Wortham lawyer, as he took her hand, "and glad, too, that you have contrived to be punctual, for these Government folk are, as our Scotch neighbors describe it, 'kittle cattle to shoe,' and not easy to get on with. I had a tough afternoon at the Home Office on Saturday, I can tell you. Mr. Tape and Sealing Wax, or whatever they may call him, who interviewed me, looked and spoke as if he would have liked to commit *me* for trial instead of Sir R., but I suspect he'll feel compelled to swallow the pill, with or without sugar, and grant us what we want. Now for my brethren of the law. You'll remember, Miss M., that it's a golden rule in giving evidence never to say a word too much. Stick to your story, but don't be led away from it."

Mavina nodded silently. Her eyes were bright, her demeanor calm and resolute, but of excitement, as of fear, there was no trace. Jasper was satisfied, and led her in. A very brief probation in an outer office among staring clerks, and then the two were called into an inner room. Here was the solicitor who was to conduct this branch of the inquiry, a member, of course, of the legal firm acting for the Treasury, a plain, middled-aged man of business, whose name was Gregg. There were others present. One of these was Mr. Mole, that eminent Chamber counsel, a barrister who never wore a wig, but whose name—never in the newspapers—was known to every attorney in the realm as that of a legal pundit, to whom bad law was what discord in music is to a great composer.

Mr. Mole, who was supposed to net some thousands a year in his quiet way without holding a brief or entering a law court, gave opinions that were prized as were the utterances of the Delphic Oracle, and had come forth from his chambers to give one now.

Then there was a Junior Lord of the Treasury, the Hon. Alberic Lovel, who was supposed to attend to see whether this was a case in which Britannia's purse strings could with propriety be unloosed. He who was M.P. for the stormy and fickle constituency of W— stood apart, faultlessly dressed, with his gardenia in his button hole, like a mere dandy who had strayed in, and only woke up to a little languid interest when he saw Mavina's handsome and remarkable face.

Also there was a gentleman from the Home Office, Mr. Paterson, a cool-headed official of thirty, sent to watch the case. And there was a grizzled personage of martial aspect, one Major Reynolds, H.E.I.C., etc., who wrote Arabic and Persian more glibly than he did English, who was learned in Sanscrit, and was reputed to know every Indian dialect, from pure Urdu to the most crabbed Canarese, and who was there as an expert.

Jasper and Mavina—the latter especially—met with a civil reception enough. The Wortham lawyer was invited to state his case, and he did state it, tellingly, and taking care, as he afterwards exultingly affirmed, to clinch every nail that he knocked in. Mr. Gregg, the Treasury Solicitor, listened to him with patient courtesy, and without showing any signs of that aversion which Mr. Horace Lackerby had been unable to repress.

Perhaps the experienced Mr. Gregg, like some renowned surgeon whose consulting room is a confessional for broken-down invalids, knew so much of human frailty as to regard it from a philosophic standpoint. The Junior Lord of the Treasury stared a little when Jasper expatiated on the use he had made in India of the funds of his betrayed client, and a slight expression of contempt was visible in the curl of his lip, but he said nothing, and quiet Mr. Paterson from the Home Office was equally reserved.

Then the original depositions, in Hindustani and in English, were laid before Major Reynolds, the expert, who brought his double eyeglass to bear upon the queer characters with a gentle sigh, perhaps of regret, that so commonplace a task as the easy one of interpreting the best-known language of India should have been assigned to a linguistic sage like himself, and presently certified that, allowing for a few trifling grammatical errors, the translation given was fairly accurate.

“I should have liked to ask those fellows—the grass-cutter and his boy—a question or two in their own tongue—the Jeloogoo,” he said, as he gave back the papers; “but I daresay the Kotwall, who, in his position, must often have been brought into contact with offenders or witnesses of their low caste, was able to interpret their dialect pretty well.”

Then the diary that had belonged to Lieutenant Graham was studied as if it had been some precious papyrus just

found in a mummy pit and professing to throw a side light on the Exodus from Egypt.

How far was it evidence? On this point and others, Mr. Mole was respectfully, and in whispering tones, consulted. The legal oracle did not commit himself by saying much, but he made copious notes, and "took time to consider" his opinion. Once or twice he nodded, and, like Lord Burleigh's nod in the *Critic*, this was supposed to mean a good deal. Once he shook his head. But he was too sound a legal workman to be in a hurry, or to omit to see the flaws as well as the strong points of the case.

"And now, Miss Malstock," politely said the Treasury Solicitor, "we shall be happy to hear, if you please, what you have to tell us as to this unfortunate affair."

Then a chair was set for Mavina nearer to the table, and she came forward, and, in reply to Mr. Gregg's questioning, told her tale. She related, with just enough of maiden modesty to make her interesting, how she had corresponded, without the knowledge of her parents; with Walter Travis during his wanderings in China, Australia, and India. She told how his letters had quite suddenly ceased; how she had written urgently, but without reply; and how a presentiment of evil had forced itself upon her, and haunted her night and day. And she narrated how she had, unsanctioned by those at home, consulted Mr. Holt, and elicited from her highly-placed friend, Lady Egeria Fitzurse, her kind promise to defray the expenses of a search in India for the missing man. Mr. Holt had undertaken to make inquiries by letter. The idea of going personally to that remote country had at first suggested itself, she believed, neither to him nor to her. The first search, undertaken by proxy, had utterly failed. The Bombay firm of lawyers had only been able to ascertain that there were floating rumors of foul play.

"Mere bazaar gossip; but it flies fast, and is often true," interjected Major Reynolds at this point. "I have known a victory or a defeat to be talked of in the bazaar before a line of official information came in, from a great distance sometimes. I beg your pardon, young lady, if I have interrupted you."

Then Mavina went on. She told how she had dined at Hurst Royal, in company with Sir Richard Harrington;

how, during Lady Sparkleton's song, after dinner, Sir Richard, who was describing to her some Indian photographic views, had accidentally shown her on his finger a remarkable ring, which she well knew, and had frequently seen on the finger of her lost friend, Mr. Walter Travis. She had asked him a question as to this ring, and he had been strangely agitated, and had made the following reply, every word of which was stamped upon her memory: "Oh, yes—the ring—it belonged to an old friend—a chum of mine in India—he died."

These words were uttered in a broken voice and in a confused manner—a manner which, to her thinking, indicated guilt. Then her own feelings had overpowered her, and she had given a cry, and fallen—swooning, as she believed, for all grew dark. She had never since then held any conversation with Sir Richard. She had shunned him, and, as it appeared to her, he had equally striven to avoid her. Mavina's evidence produced, clearly, a powerful impression on the audience. There was a murmur, as of sympathy, in which all joined, save only placid Mr. Mole, the Chamber counsel.

"You are quite sure, Miss Malstock, that this ring was the very one that you remember to have belonged to the missing Mr. Walter Travis?" questioned the Treasury Solicitor, cautiously. "You cannot be too particular as to what you will have to affirm on oath."

"I am quite sure," replied Mavina, with heightened color and steadfast eyes; "I could not be mistaken there. Poor Walter Travis"—her voice trembled here, and all felt sorry for her—"talked to me, often, of that ring. It was one that had been given to his mother long ago by his father, the Admiral. They are both dead now, Walter's parents. The ring was not a common one. It was of Indian workmanship—Admiral Travis brought it from Calcutta, I think—a serpent in yellow gold, set with three fine rubies, round which its coils were twisted—an unusual device. Walter set great store by it. I am sure he never parted with it until—until—"

She broke down, sobbing, here, and by this time she had made a partisan of every man present, even including calm Mr. Mole, who really felt somewhat of a generous glow run through his veins at the sight of the girl's distress.

The Solicitor to the Treasury looked at the Junior Lord, and read assent in his eyes. Britannia might unloose her purse strings, and welcome, to bring to light such hidden iniquity as that which had just been denounced. The Home Office, so far as Mr. Paterson's opinion went, was of one mind with the Hon. M.P. for W—. After this, Mavina was pressed with no more questions. Her deposition, of which Mr. Gregg had taken notes, was written out *in extenso*, and she was asked to read it over and to sign it. And this she did.

Then there was more confabulation with Mr. Mole as to his reversed points of law, and some solemn talk, on the part of the Treasury Solicitor, about laying the complete case before the Secretary of State for the Home Department, and referring it also to "My Lords," as to expenses, but before Jasper and Miss Malstock were bowed out, they were given informally to understand that the Official Inquiry craved for would almost certainly be granted.

CHAPTER XXXI.

STILL UP IN LONDON.

MAVINA was in no hurry to return to Wortham and the domestic circle in Crown Street. On the contrary, she much preferred to remain for awhile as a guest beneath the Crockfords' hospitable roof, and to allow her visit to endure to the end of the period originally proposed.

For this choice she had two good reasons. First, any abrupt curtailment of her stay in town would occasion wonder and comment; and, secondly, the whirl and bustle of London life served to distract her thoughts and to calm the nervous excitement caused by the eager pursuit of her revenge.

Jasper Holt, too, was quite willing to remain for the present at his hotel in the Strand. He could not well show himself in Wortham without having an interview with Sir Richard Harrington, and with all his effrontery, he was reluctant to meet his betrayed client face to face.

Later on it would be different. Should the decision of the Government be for prompt action, as there was reason

to hope, then Mr. Holt could accompany the members of the Commission who would be appointed to conduct the inquiry, and would thus avoid awkward questions asked in private. He did not, however, intend to eat the bread of idleness, so having business of his own in London, he still contrived to be active while awaiting the decree of the Home Secretary and "My Lords" of Her Majesty's Treasury.

Whatever, during his sojourn in London, the nature and importance of Jasper's metropolitan business may have been, he managed to make it compatible with being a constant visitor in Cambridge Terrace. Mavina had introduced him to the Crockfords, and the north-country solicitor had found favor with the family with whom Miss Malstock was domiciled.

Mr. Holt could be agreeable when he liked, at least to those who were not gifted with ultra delicacy of perception; and in his desire to be allowed to pay court to Mavina, he did his best to please. His fearless manner and loud rattling talk impressed the meek mistress of the house, and won the suffrages of the susceptible Jemima, who quite envied her friend for possessing such an admirer.

Even pompous Mr. Crockford took a fancy to him, as a shrewd fellow who knew a great deal about electioneering, and was thoroughly conciliated when Jasper, who soon found the length, so to speak, of his host's foot, indulged him with a little of his caustic humor at the expense of a rival Parliamentary agent, Mr. Bluffitt, by whom Jemima's papa had been worsted more often than he cared to acknowledge.

"So that was what you north country folk said of Bluffitt, did you, when he came down to carry your county by storm? Ho! ho! ho! Very good, Mr. Holt."

But Mr. Crockford omitted to mention that on the occasion of their last contest, professionally, Mr. Bluffitt had held him up to ridicule under the nicknames of "Don Pomposo," "Old High and Mighty," and so forth, and had turned the laugh against him whenever a passage of arms occurred.

Jasper was so bent on winning Mavina, now by the all but proved death of her former lover freed from any previous engagement, that he would have undertaken to earn

the good-will of more difficult critics than were the Crockfords for her sake. He was soon in the habit of calling daily in Cambridge Terrace, insomuch that the very footman, the very housemaids, came to know him well, and to designate him, after the fashion of servants, as Miss Maltstock's young man. Not a member of the family, not a dweller in the basement storey, but felt morally certain that Mr. Holt was then in London expressly on Mavina's account, and that the legal business of which he spoke was a mere colorable pretext. And, below stairs, sundry speculations were afloat as to the probable amount of his income, and whether or not in accepting him Miss Maltstock would make a good match.

"Some of those country lawyers are uncommon comfortable, I believe," said the footman, into whose hand Jasper had slipped a half sovereign but the day before.

"Get so many oysters to their own cheek, don't they, and leave their clients the shells to dine upon!" rejoined the fat cook.

"Anyhow," remarked a quick-eyed housemaid, "if he comes from the country, his clothes don't, for he's as spruce as can be."

It was not only in patronizing, for the nonce, a Bond Street tailor, or in giving tips to servants, that Jasper showed himself liberal. There are always ways and means for a pleasure seeker in London to get rid of his superfluous cash, and the Wortham lawyer was active in procuring tickets for expensive concerts and boxes at fashionable theatres, so that the Crockfords, mother and daughter, were delighted to have made so agreeable an acquaintance.

No one, beneath the Crockfords' hospitable roof, no one of those friends of the Cambridge Terrace family to whom Jasper was introduced, could have divined that both he and Mavina were in London to play the part, as Avengers of Guilt, that the Greeks assigned to those grim Eumenides, who, in the terrible drama of *Æschylus*, pursue the fated Orestes; or that they were as staunch as bloodhounds on the track of ill-starred Sir Richard Harrington.

They were very cautious not to let a word drop before strangers that could throw light upon the real motive for their stay, or reveal that there was any link between them other than there seemed to be.

Of course, from time to time, Jasper Holt had some-

thing to say as to the progress of their common enterprise, but he managed so that Mavina's ear alone should receive the communication, and wiser persons than Jemima and her mother would have failed to guess that there was a serious purpose underlying the country girl's natural wish to enjoy a share of the amusements of London.

With regard to Jasper's actual courtship, the opinions of the lookers on were divided as to how it throve. There were times when Mavina perceptibly thawed towards her admirer, and others when she seemed, not light and frivolous, like her shallow-brained school-fellow, but quite calm and indifferent.

Mr. Holt was not in the least discouraged when he found his ladylove in such a mood as that above described. He flattered himself—as such men are sure to do—that he, to use his own words, “knew all about” women. At any rate, he was cognizant of some of the peculiarities of the sex, and not unfairly concluded that when Miss Malstock seemed most wrapped up in her own thoughts, it was the memory of the dead lover that occupied her meditations. Jasper was not far wrong in his conjecture.

The one ennobling feature in Mavina's faulty character had been the sincerity of her attachment to the wandering adventurer who had fascinated her girlish fancy. For his sake, had he been so minded; she would have done anything, faced any amount of poverty and hardship. She was too sensible to let her romance cloud her mental vision, and knew quite well that the wife of an emigrant must endure much; but had Walter Travis asked her to share with him a smoky log hut in Australia, or a shanty in New Zealand, she would have cheerfully gone with him to the Antipodes.

And now Mavina was left to follow the promptings of her own heart. These were very various, and in some respects clashed with one another. Her nature—the one cardinal virtue of unselfish love apart—was in its essence false, sly and self-seeking. Even the capricious kindness of her early patroness, even the helpful good nature of her friend the Lady Egeria, she resented somehow, as if the benefits conferred on her had been injuries in disguise. Why had she been picked out as the pet and plaything of a whimsical woman like the late Marchioness of Cheviot? Why was she inducted to the favor of a girl of high rank

for such social pleasures as her native county could supply? Not that Miss Malstock was at all inclined to content herself with the humdrum tameness of domestic life in Crown Street and with the small society of Wortham proper. On the contrary, she wished to soar and to shine, and was keenly alive to the subtle difference of tone and manners between say, the Crockfords and the families who in the north had welcomed her for Lady Egeria's sake. She had often dreamed of taking her place, by right and not by sufferance, among the Brahmins, of whom simple townfolk spoke with bated breath.

It is not wonderful that, with these darkling thoughts in her mind, and haunted, too, by recollections of her lost Walter, Mavina should have found it hard to smile upon her present adorer. Yet there were times when she doubted whether she could do better for herself than to encourage Jasper Holt. The man was astute and bold; ambitious, too, after his lights, and might yet work his way a good deal higher up the ladder of worldly success. He could do that the easier if he had a wife who could assist him to climb. Mavina thought that she could do that. She had heard the country gentlemen grumbling against Tatham and Gudge, respectable family solicitors, who had helped two or three generations of magnates to bemuddle their affairs. Perhaps, were Miss Malstock, whom they knew, to become Mrs. Holt, her persuasive manner might bring a superior class of clients to the narrow office in Mill Lane. There was leisure enough, however, to think of this when the immediate object should be achieved. First of all, Sir Richard Harrington must be hunted down, and then—why, then there would be time to think of Jasper Holt and his addresses.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE STORM BURSTS.

THE weather, consistently fickle in our island, had changed again, and frost and snow showers and biting winds had given place to the mild moist mornings and mellow afternoons that gladdened Sir Simon's heart, and gave many a

good run to the Border Foxhounds. And now, in the short daylight of a cloudy winter's day, there arrived at Wortham, traveling by the express from London, a party whose rooms had been bespoken by telegraph at the Rose and Crown.

At last the Government had ceased to hesitate. The official inquiry, long pending, had been decided upon, and the members of the Commission who had been appointed to conduct it had arrived at Wortham.

There was Mr. Paterson from the Home Office ; there was the Treasury Solicitor, Mr. Gregg, with Major Reynolds of the Indian Army ; and a celebrated London surgeon and authority on medical jurisprudence, Dr. Hope, on whom, according to well-informed paragraphs in the papers, a baronetcy, previously declined, was about to be conferred. Also, traveling by the same train, there came four members of the detective force, an inspector, a sergeant, and two constables in plain clothes, from Scotland Yard, while the chief of the county constabulary had received a summons to attend.

There was another member of the Commission, who, on account of his rank and local dignity, had been included in it, and who presently made his appearance in the great first-floor sitting-room of the Rose and Crown in as complete a state of mental perturbation as well could be. This was the Marquess of Cheviot, Lord Lieutenant of the County, who had been reduced to a condition of nervous anxiety from the moment that this new duty was thrust upon him.

"You are aware, gentlemen, that Sir Richard Harrington is a private friend of mine," said the marquess.

Mr. Paterson of the Home Office was aware of that. So was Mr. Gregg, the Treasury Solicitor. But this was a case so important, and an inquiry so delicate, that the higher authorities had thought it best to include Lord Cheviot among the Commissioners in preference to selecting any other magistrate.

"Still, it makes the business a very painful one to me, as you will allow," said the marquess, who felt excessively as if he had suddenly been raised among the judges of a revolutionary tribunal.

Mr. Gregg it was who acted as chief of the staff, and organized the plan of campaign. He had his scheme cut

and dried. The marquess was asked to write a note requesting Sir Richard's presence on urgent affairs at the Wortham hotel. Already a dogcart was waiting with a messenger to hurry over to Greystone with the missive.

Of course the marquess demurred. He thought, though he did not say so, that he was being made to play the part of decoy duck as well as judge. But Mr. Gregg, and Mr. Paterson too, had such valid reasons to allege that he was over-persuaded.

It was the only way, they very sensibly said, to prevent scandal, if it could be prevented. Much, very much, would depend on Sir Richard being able to give satisfactory replies to questions that must be put. It was better to see him at the Rose and Crown, on neutral ground, as it were, than to pursue the interrogatory under his own roof at Greystone Abbey. The marquess, therefore, reluctantly wrote what he was asked to write, and the dogcart rattled off with the note, which had been entrusted to no less careful a messenger than Inspector Fielder from Scotland Yard.

There was a dreary period of waiting. Mr. Paterson tried to utilize it by getting the marquess to read the depositions. But the marquess would not read the deposition:

"Thank you—thank you," he said, sidling away from the formidable array of documents; "I have from the Secretary of State's letters a general idea of the case; and, for the moment, prefer to let the details alone. I do hope, though, that the poor fellow may be able to clear himself."

"I echo the wish, I am sure," said Mr. Paterson, who was a scholar and a gentleman.

So did not, of course, two other persons of our acquaintance, who were shut up together in a private room downstairs, waiting till they should be wanted. One of these was Jasper Holt, solicitor-at-law, who had journeyed down with the members of the Commission. The other was Mavina Malstock, who had returned home but the day before from her pleasant London visit to her old school-mate, Jemima Crockford, and who now sat, closely veiled and silent, in the corner farthest from the window of the little ground-floor parlor into which she had been ushered. It goes without saying that Doctor and Mrs. Malstock were still quite in ignorance of Mavina's real object in

visiting London, or of the nature of the interest which she took in the affairs of the baronet.

Throughout the Rose and Crown there was an uneasy feeling of feverish expectancy. The very waiter and chambermaids were in a state of disquiet, partly caused by the presence of the police from London; while the landlady, worthy creature, felt as though a gang of Nihilist conspirators had chosen her respectable hotel for their headquarters. Who were these mysterious strangers from London, who had the chief constable under their orders, and at whose summons the Lord Lieutenant of the shire had come to join their conclave?

Mrs. Sharland's most plausible guess was that the matter was somehow connected with the parliamentary representation of borough or county, or both. But, if so, why was the marquess evoked from Hurst Royal, and were the sitting members to be impeached for high treason and sent through the Traitor's Gate, and perhaps eventually to Tower Hill?

Meanwhile, among those better informed as to the business pending, there was very little conversation going on. Major Reynolds, the Indian expert, read the newspaper in a corner. Dr. Hope had pulled out his pocket book, and was knitting his shaggy brows over the memoranda it contained. The Treasury Solicitor busied himself in sorting out papers and preparing for what was to come. The marquess paced to and fro, drumming on the window glass with his fingers, and then walking back to beat what Major Reynolds afterwards designated as the "devil's tattoo" upon the huge mahogany table.

Mr. Paterson went in and out, now exchanging a few words with the chief constable, waiting by himself below; now speaking in an undertone to the sergeant of detectives, who, with his men, were in a room at the back; and then attempting to discuss matters with the marquess, who had never in his life felt more completely out of his element.

It was a relief to all when the sharp sound of hurrying hoofs and wheels announced the return of the messenger from Greystone. Mr. Gregg, the Treasury Solicitor, who had hustled forward to the window at the first sound, came eagerly to meet Mr. Paterson, his colleague, who had just re-entered the room.

"Here he is!" whispered the government lawyer to the official from the Home Office; "I caught a glimpse of him as he drove under the archway: a tall, fair-haired young man. He must have come over in the dogcart, as I expected, with Inspector Fielder. Nothing could be neater."

And, indeed, a moment afterwards, the name of Sir Richard Harrington was announced by a perceptibly frightened waiter, and the owner of the name came in. He started, and looked with surprise at the strange faces around him; then smiled, and with a slight bow passed on to where the marquess stood, the very picture of perplexity.

"Lucky I was at home, Lord Cheviot, when your note reached me," said the baronet, holding out his hand.

The marquess had not the moral courage to reject that offered hand, red with blood unfairly shed though it was deemed to be; so he took it, but stiffly and with a very bad grace, so that Sir Richard, glancing at his old friend's gloomy countenance, had reason to remark—

"Something wrong, I am afraid?"

"You had better let these gentlemen explain what is amiss," replied the marquess, almost with a sob in his kind old voice; "I, for one, am a most unwilling actor in all this."

"Ours is a painful duty, Sir Richard, although we are total strangers to yourself," said urbane Mr. Paterson, tendering his card; "I may as well mention at once that Mr. Gregg, one of the Solicitors for the Treasury, Dr. Hope, Major Reynolds, and myself, with the Marquess of Cheviot here, have been officially appointed as commissioners to conduct an inquiry, and that we have been compelled at the outset to request your presence here."

"To answer a few questions," said Mr. Gregg, completing the sentence, as he saw his colleague hesitate.

Sir Richard had drawn himself up to his full height. He threw a half-reproachful glance at the marquess, and then bowed coldly to the strangers.

"This comes on me as a surprise," he said calmly; "but I am quite at your service, gentlemen. May I ask, first, to what the inquiry refers?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly," replied Mr. Gregg, rustling among the papers that lay ready to his hand. "The inquiry, Sir Richard, has reference to the death, in India,

of a British subject named Walter Travis, with whom you are alleged—I say only alleged—to have had a hostile discussion on the evening that preceded the day on which—other events are said to have occurred.”

“I never, to my knowledge, saw such a man during my stay in India, and most assuredly had no discussion, hostile or otherwise, with him,” boldly replied the baronet.

The old Indian officer threw a compassionate glance at the young lord of Greystone.

“Caution is better than rashness in these cases, Sir Richard,” he said. “You had better consult your memory. The testimony of the Parsee landlord and the Eurasian billiard marker is very explicit as to the time, place, and nature of the dispute, which you appear to have forgotten.”

Sir Richard shook his head.

“Your words, Major Reynolds,” he said almost sullenly, “are an enigma to me. I repeat that I was not acquainted with the person you speak of.”

“Not even by name, Sir Richard?” asked the Treasury Solicitor, who had been eyeing him keenly, and who noticed how the tell-tale color rose and fell in his fair face.

“Confound his name—I know it well enough,” broke out the baronet, irritably; “malicious tongues have been busy in coupling his name with mine—I know not why—ever since I left India. But still I had no personal acquaintance with the bearer of the name.”

“Perhaps,” said Mr. Gregg, smoothly, “a mere casual encounter.”

“I tell you,” interrupted Sir Richard, hotly, “that, casually or not, I had no dealings—no intercourse—with such a man.”

This dogged and repeated denial seemed to render it useless to press the questioning any further. After a brief colloquy with Mr. Paterson, the Solicitor to the Treasury spoke again.

“I think, and so does my colleague,” he said, “that the fairest plan, now, will be to read aloud, in the presence of Sir Richard, the body of written evidence which has been obtained from India, and which has been the ground for these proceedings. If you will kindly be seated, Sir Richard, and will oblige me by listening, I will undertake this task. We shall see our way the quicker then.”

Sir Richard, a defiant look in his eyes, drew up a chair, sat down, and, with folded arms, waited, while Mr. Gregg selected a paper, and began to read aloud. As he did so, detailing, piece by piece, the evidence from Futtehpore, the marquess sat apart from the London Commissioners, and appeared, if the simile can be decorously applied to a kindly old gentleman of high degree, as uncomfortable as a bear on hot irons. When a certain point had been reached, Mr. Gregg laid down the budget of papers.

"If you have any comments to make, Sir Richard, or explanations to give, the Commission will give them due attention," said the Treasury Solicitor.

"It is all very unreasonable, to my mind," answered the baronet; "I have heard, in what you have just read, names known to me mixed up with events of which I have no recollection, or as to which I can give a flat denial. I know, or knew an officer of my own Lancer regiment called Graham. We were intimate. I saw his death very recently announced in a newspaper. But he never was my second in any duel, regular or not. And I had a native servant, a valet, or mussaulchee, called Govind. He was, as I had cause to suspect, dishonest, and I intended to discharge him. As for the name of the Syce, it has escaped my memory. But the story these black fellows tell is all moonshine. Of Walter Travis, if he ever existed, I know nothing. As for my meeting him at day-break with pistols in the jungle, I can only say that the whole thing is a fable. I wish I knew who has dared to malign me, I assure you. I have an agent, now in India, who will, I trust, be able to trace these lying reports to their source."

"Perhaps he may," responded, drily, the experienced Mr. Gregg.

"I think now, gentlemen, that we may venture to request the attendance of the living witnesses waiting below—of Miss Malstock and Mr. Holt, I mean!"

Sir Richard and Lord Cheviot started.

"Miss Malstock!" exclaimed the marquess; "why, what on earth can that young lady have to do with what happened out in India, where she never was?"

The Treasury Solicitor smiled at the simplicity of the question.

"You are quite correct, my lord," he said, "and of

India, save by hearsay, Miss Malstock knows nothing. But her evidence on one point has been thought important enough to make her presence necessary ;” and as he spoke he rang the bell twice. The signal had probably been preconcerted, since, after a brief delay, the door opened, and Jasper Holt, without waiting for any one to announce him, made his entrance unabashed, in company with Mavina, still veiled. Sir Richard rose from his chair. “How is this, sir?” he said, addressing Mr. Holt in a voice quivering with rage; “I thought you were some thousands of miles away attending to my interests, and instead of that I find that you have come sneaking back to England without a word of excuse, and are now leaguering with my enemies! Is that your idea, Mr. Holt, of a lawyer’s duty to a client and paymaster?”

There was a moment when it seemed as if Sir Richard, whose excitement increased as he spoke, would certainly strike Jasper Holt, who, on his part, maintained an attitude of coolness and sturdy defiance, and met, unflinchingly, the angry gaze of his indignant employer. But Major Reynolds and Mr. Paterson were quick to intervene, and their interference gave the baronet time to curb his first furious impulse.

He turned away scornfully, and rescaled himself. He had had time to reflect, **and** saw that mere violence, whether of word or deed, could but injure his cause. He took no further notice of the Wortham lawyer, but sat watchfully and silently, as if preparing for the worst. Mavina, from behind her veil, eyed him with a glance of malignant triumph.

There he was, brought to bay, entrapped, with heavy odds against him, no longer fortune’s favorite, but an object of obloquy and suspicion. There he was, accused of the crime committed so far away, this murderer of her lost lover, and she so gloried in her own share in bringing about his ruin and disgrace that she entirely forgot the presence of the Marquess of Cheviot, or the opinion which that nobleman might form of his daughter’s humble friend. She, too, waited while Mr. Gregg, bustling up to the table, made a fresh arrangement of the papers and cleared his throat to speak. The proceedings were manifestly about to enter on a new phase.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RUBY RING.

"I WILL now," said, after a brief pause, the Solicitor to Her Majesty's Treasury, "proceed to read out Miss Malstock's deposition, taken down, signed, and attested officially in London."

Mr. Gregg looked around him as he spoke. There was no dissent ; so he proceeded to do as he had proposed.

Mavina's written statement produced a powerful effect on those who now heard it for the first time. The marquess groaned audibly. Sir Richard winced like a thorough-bred horse under a whip stroke.

"You are at perfect liberty, Sir Richard, to ask the witness any questions you think fit," said the Treasury Solicitor.

The baronet shook his head sullenly. He could not, for his very life, frame the words in which to address Mavina, who had now put up her veil, and looked at him with absolute composure.

"Or, of course, to enter into any explanation as regards the ring and the scene at Hurst Royal," suggested Mr. Paterson, very gently.

"That," replied the baronet, in a dogged tone that grated on the ear, "I am willing to do. I have such a ring as—as Miss Malstock has described. Here it is."

He drew it forth from his waistcoat pocket as he spoke, and laid it on the table.

All eyes turned, naturally, towards the glittering gewgaw, which Mr. Gregg quietly picked up, examined, and then handed it round among the Commissioners, all of whom, save the marquess, scrutinized it carefully and with interest.

"Yes, yes ; Indian workmanship, sure enough. I could have told as much, had I been blind, by the mere touch," remarked Major Reynolds. "A strange device too, with the snake's golden coils going round the three rubies,

as that young lady very accurately told us. Perhaps Sir Richard will inform us how this curious ring first passed into his possession?"

"I took it," answered Sir Richard, in the same harsh, dull voice, "from the finger of my poor dead brother, Lionel Harrington, as he lay in his bier, awaiting the arrival of the workmen who were to close the coffin. He died, as some of you may be aware, under strange circumstances. He and I, with several more, fell into an ambush of lurking natives as we were escorting treasure through the jungle. I escaped, unhurt, by a miracle, as it seemed, amidst the flashing sword blades; but poor Lionel was either made prisoner by the robbers, or eluded them, and got lost in the forest, and there sickened of cholera, then raging in the district. He was quite dead and cold when we were led to the charcoal burners' hut, where his body lay."

"Then why, Sir Richard, did you drop no hint of this when Miss Malstock asked you whence you had the ring at Hurst Royal?" demanded Mr. Gregg.

The baronet turned towards him with a sickly smile.

"Perhaps I was foolishly sentimental, sir," he said; "but I was reluctant to breathe poor Lionel's name in conversing with yonder lady, with whom my acquaintance was very slight. I said I had it from a friend who died in India."

"And you would affirm on oath, Sir Richard, that this ring was one taken from the finger of Sir Lionel, your late brother?" said the solicitor.

The baronet nodded assent.

"Miss Malstock, on the other hand, is prepared to swear that the ring—well known to her—belonged to Walter Travis, whose mother had worn it before it became his?" demanded Mr. Gregg.

"Anywhere—in any court of justice"—said Mavina, firmly, "can I swear to that ring, which I have seen fifty times or more on the finger of its late owner, Walter Travis. I recognized it instantly when I saw it on that of his murderer."

There was a stir and a little confusion here. The marquess lifted up his voice in protest. So did—more mildly—Mr. Gregg.

"Let us avoid strong expressions, if you please, Miss

Malstock, though we can all make the utmost allowance for excited feelings," he said. "This is a mere inquiry; not a trial at bar. I propose, now, to read aloud the remainder of the Indian evidence."

He did so, slowly and emphatically, exhibiting the diary of the late Lieutenant Graham, with its memorandum as to the alleged meeting in the jungle, and then going on to the evidence of Lashgar, the native carpenter, as to the identity of the body that lay on the bed in Captain Harrington's quarters, and which he helped to lift into the coffin, with that of his former customer, Walter Travis.

And then, indeed, a remarkable change came over Sir Richard.

Hitherto he had seemed downcast, indeed, but sullen, and at times haughtily indignant. Now he grew ashen white, and grasped his chair with tremulous hands, while his eyes appeared as if they beheld some horrid vision unseen by the rest. Once he lifted his head and inclined his ear, as the deaf do, to hear more distinctly. And when Mr. Gregg ceased to read, and asked him, courteously, if he had any queries to put to Mr. Holt, or any observations to offer, he only turned his face towards the Treasury Solicitor without speaking.

"Take time, Sir Richard," said the considerate Mr. Paterson.

Twice the baronet opened his livid lips and tried to speak, but no sound followed.

Dr. Hope bent his shaggy brows, and looked at him frowningly. The old Anglo-Indian officer looked sad; perhaps because of the discredit thrown on the profession of arms. Even the marquess recoiled a little, and pursed up his lips.

"These are, you must admit, Sir Richard, very suspicious circumstances," said the Treasury Solicitor; "and we should all be glad if you could explain them away; but, if not, other steps must be taken. We, the Commissioners, are animated by no sort of animosity against yourself, as your words, lately, indicated that you thought; nor has this inquiry been conducted in a hostile spirit. We should rejoice were your innocence of any guilty knowledge as to the fate of Walter Travis once made clear. But, if not, we must do our duty."

"Am I to understand, then, that I am formally accused

of the murder of this man, Walter Travis?" demanded the baronet.

"You are! You are!" exclaimed Mavina and Jasper, at once.

Sir Richard started as if a wasp had stung him.

"And am I to consider myself, a prisoner, then?" he demanded of Mr. Gregg.

The Treasury Solicitor told him, in smooth language, that he did not occupy such a position, but that it would be well, on every account, that he should remain at hand and lend whatever assistance he could to further the inquiry. There might, too, be documents or letters at Greystone Abbey which would aid in throwing light upon the truth.

Sir Richard smiled bitterly.

"My keys, and all that is mine," he said, briefly, "shall be at your disposal, gentlemen. Search where you will, read what you please, since your official duty compels it. I presume that I shall be free to consult legal advisers, since my late agent betrayed me."

"Excuse me, Sir Richard, if I rise to vindicate myself," said Jasper, plausibly. "I repudiate the word 'betrayed,' and assure you that when I found the real complexion of the case, which was not at the outset, public feeling and conscience urged me to reveal to the proper authorities such discoveries as my journey to India enabled me to make. Of the sums received from you, I am ready, at the right moment, to render a strict account. But I was no hireling to hush up a dark secret like yours, merely to curry favor with a client of yesterday!"

This was very well said, but, somehow, it rang false on every ear, save that of Mavina, intent on her revenge.

Sir Richard only answered by a scowl and a sneer, while Mr. Paterson made haste to assure him that he was welcome to call in any professional aid he pleased.

"We now," said Dr. Hope, speaking for the first time, "have a very important portion of our task before us, and had better attend to it at once, the rather that both Mr. Paterson and myself are required, according to our engagements, to be back in London to-morrow afternoon. I allude to the necessary identification of the body brought home to Greystone from India as that of the late Sir Lionel Harrington. However distressing to the feelings of the living, we must do our duty as regards the dead."

Again Sir Richard's cheek blanched as before, and his eyes seemed to glare into vacancy, as if he saw what was invisible to others. But he recovered his presence of mind, and in a cold and haughty tone demanded what was meant. He was at a loss, so he declared, as to the purport of the words uttered.

Mr. Gregg coughed and fidgeted with the papers before he took upon himself the task of explanation.

"Sir Richard Harrington," he said, "if you will put yourself, for a moment, in our place, I think you will admit that our obvious duty is to make sure that the body of your predecessor in the title, brought from India, and interred at Greystone, is really that of the late Sir Lionel. There are grounds for surmising that such is not the case. It is possible that the remains brought home to England may be those of another person. At any rate, it is imperative that the truth should be ascertained. With this view, it seems needful that the family vault at Greystone church should be opened, and the body enclosed in the coffin of your late brother, Sir Richard, identified by competent testimony."

"Open a vault—a coffin! Really, Mr. Gregg, your suggestion shocks me," said the good-natured marquess, while the baronet sat speechless, turning his haggard eyes from one face to another, and with a sort of twitching of his dry lips.

"On second thoughts," said Mr. Paterson, persuasively, "I think your lordship will perceive the necessity for such a course, which has already received the explicit sanction of the Secretary of State. Every care will be taken, my lord, to spare Sir Richard's feelings, and the search will be decorously, and indeed reverently, made, but none the less must it occur. The evidence of the Hindoo carpenter, Lashgar, as to the apparent substitution of one body for another, at Futtehpoore, forces us to ascertain what corpse was really buried at Greystone."

"And if there could have been any doubt as to our plain duty," added Mr. Gregg, "I think his lordship will acknowledge that Sir Richard's own statement makes it doubly imperative to make the vault give up its secret. Sir Richard has told us that he took the ruby ring from the finger of his dead brother, Lionel, in India. Miss Malstock deposes to the ring as having been constantly worn

by Walter Travis, the missing man, into whose death, by alleged foul play, we are here to inquire. And Lashgar, the native carpenter, has sworn that the corpse he helped to place in the coffin was that of his well-known customer, Walter Travis. Under these circumstances, and as two of the Commissioners have to return to London early to-morrow, we propose to have the vault at Greystone opened to-night."

"To-night!" echoed Sir Richard, who spoke and looked as if he were under the influence of some hideous dream, while even the marquess stood aghast.

"To-night!" he said, almost gaspingly; "you may believe me, gentlemen, when I tell you that this is to me the most distressing piece of duty that has ever fallen to my lot. But I suppose it must be done."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE OPENING OF THE VAULT.

THE marquess had at last made up his mind. He would not be active, but he would throw no impediment in the way of the working members of the Commission. And indeed he could not but, in his heart of hearts, own that the circumstances were such as to warrant fearful suspicions, while the bearing of the accused was such as to confirm the prejudice against him.

He still hoped that the son of his old friend might clear himself of the vile charges laid at his door, but he could not take up the cudgels in defence of one whose nerves or conscience made him so unfit to assert his innocence as the baronet appeared to be.

Candles were rung for, as it was now growing quite dark, and refreshments were brought in for those who needed them. Carriages had already been ordered for the transport of the party, and of the auxiliaries, to Greystone. The chief constable had been requested to get together some of his men, under the charge of a superintendent.

The London detectives had by this time enlisted the services of some Wortham workmen, who were ready, with their tools, and with a store of lanterns and torches,

since it would be black night when Greystone should be reached.

This was not all. Sir Richard, somewhat tardily, had requested that his father's solicitors should be sent for. The Crown Street office of the firm was near, and old Mr. Tatham, whose dwelling adjoined it, soon came, and was speedily joined by his junior partner, Mr. Gudge.

These two respectable lawyers, who had for many years transacted business for the Harrington family, undertook to watch the proceedings on the young baronet's behalf. They were horror-stricken, but stout in their adherence to the cause of so hereditary a client, the rather, perhaps, since Jasper Holt, who was gall and wormwood to them professionally, was conspicuous on the opposite side. Also, by the advice of Dr. Hope, three of the local medical men were summoned, to act as experts and referees. Of these, one was Dr. Malstock ; another a certain Dr. Bedford, in good practice, and who was known to have attended the late Admiral Travis and his wife, and who was, therefore, probably acquainted with their son ; the third was a clever young surgeon, Mr. Thompson.

Some time was lost in collecting these new recruits, and in giving them a brief explanation of the reason for their being asked to attend. And Dr. Malstock had to learn, for the first time, his daughter's connection with the case, and to send a note to his wife, bidding her not to be alarmed at Mavina's prolonged absence.

It was quite an imposing array of carriages, gigs and light carts which at length set off for Greystone.

Some little stir had been caused, even in quiet Wortham, by the stealthy bustle that had been going on ; and there was quite a crowd gathered to stare at the procession of vehicles that left the Rose and Crown.

Some of the boys even followed on foot, or getting a lift, illicitly, behind some carriage ; and among these was the lad called Jerry. Inspector Fielder had made a second journey in the dogcart, and had apprised the Vicar of Greystone of the intention of those in authority, so that when the old church was reached the incumbent of the parish was waiting in the vestry for the Commissioners from London, and the sexton had thrown open the church door, and was ready to assist in carrying out the work in hand.

Sundry of the villagers, too, strayed in, so that the darkling aisles were full of people, surging to and fro, and overflowing into the chancel, and still more into what was locally styled the Harrington chapel, the oldest part of the existing church, and in which were monuments and brasses not a few commemorating the long dead.

A strange scene it was, and one never to be forgotten by the more thoughtful of those present, as the ruddy gleam of the lighted torches fell on tomb and statue, and on the empty shrine that was yet traceable in the thick wall, but before which waxlights had not burned, nor votive offerings been heaped, for more than three centuries past. The red glare of the light fell, too, on the rough pavement, on the sepulchral brasses, and on the pale faces of those who gathered round the workmen as they busied themselves with crowbar, pick, and chisel, in clearing away the cement and raising the stone that blocked the entrance to the vault below.

Palest among these was the fair young face of Sir Richard, as he stood, sullen and despondent, a little apart from the rest. The London detectives, though they kept in the background, watched him narrowly; Inspector Fielder, mechanically, as it were, fingered a pair of steel somethings, that clinked faintly, in the right-hand pocket of his overcoat, and exchanged glances with Sergeant Flint, in whose expressive eyes he read committal and remand and all the formularies of British justice.

At last the huge stone was lifted, and the broad, shallow steps that led down into the gloomy vault were perceptible, while from below seemed to rise a moist and clammy vapor, in which even the red glare of the blazing torches became pallid and dim. Then, led by the sexton, the party of workmen who had been brought from Wortham descended, and after some delay reappeared, carrying, by their united efforts, a weighty burthen, with which they staggered up the steps.

The bearers laid down their load upon the stone pavement near the Crusader's tomb. There could be no doubt as to the accuracy of their choice. Time had not had time to tarnish the crimson velvet, nor to dim the brightness of the silver-gilt plates that bore the name and date of the death, as well as the heraldic insignia, of young Sir Lionel.

Then the masons fell back, and other craftsmen proceeded to unfasten the paraphernalia of lead and iron and velvet-covered wood, within which are encased the remains of the wealthy and the proud.

This, slowly and decorously performed, was a work of time, and next there was to unwind and open the shroud, and to lay bare to view the lineaments of the dead.

There was a moment of hushed expectancy, of awe-stricken silence, and then a piercing female shriek broke the stillness, as Mavina Malstock darted forward, and fell on her knees beside the open coffin, sobbing wildly.

“My poor Walter! Yes, it is Walter’s face!” she moaned out. “I know him now—should know him anywhere—here he lies—dead—murdered!”

There was a general murmur of sympathy, horror and indignation among those present. All were shocked, although the suspicions of many were but confirmed. Dr. Malstock hastened forward to draw his weeping daughter aside, entreating her to be calm; but she continued, in a wailing tone, to repeat her assurance that the body just revealed to sight was that of Walter Travis.

The countenance of the dead man had indeed changed very little since the day of interment. The tint of the skin was darkened, and the features wore a slight expression as of pain, but were quite recognizable.

Robert Malstock, M.R.C.S., after a short inspection, quite agreed with Mr. Philip Bedford, M.D., in affirming that the marble face before them was that, not of Sir Lionel Harrington, whom they had known by sight, but of Walter Travis, who had been still better known to both while still among the living. Even the young surgeon, Mr. Thompson, though less confidently, declared his recognition of the only son of the late Admiral Travis, formerly a resident of Swaffam Regis, near Wortham, and a member of the cricket club.

“Will Sir Richard Harrington, after this, persist in denying his knowledge of the deceased, Walter Travis?” asked Mr. Gregg, more sternly than he had spoken as yet. All eyes were turned upon the baronet, who stood there, bareheaded and pale, in the full glare of the torchlight. All present waited, eagerly, for his reply, but none came, save from Mr. Gudge, the family lawyer, with whom Sir Richard had previously exchanged some words in an undertone.

"Our client," said Mr. Gudge, "prefers to reserve his defence. I am authorized to state on his behalf that he affirms his own innocence, as to bringing about the death of Walter Travis, but he is unable at present to say more."

There was again a murmur among the bystanders. The marquess compressed his lips and frowned. The other members of the Commission looked at one another, and conferred in whispers. Sir Richard, rolling his haggard eyes around the gathered groups, read condemnation in every face, and pity in but two of the countenances on which his glance rested. One of these belonged to the noble owner of Hurst Royal; the other, oddly enough, to the lad Jerry, who had held his horse when first he dropped in at Mr. Holt's office in Mill Lane, and who was in the act of whispering to another stripling of the same dubious aspect that he was "sorry to see the governor in Queer Street."

"That the body before our eyes is not that of Sir Lionel Harrington, and that it is that of Walter Travis, we may safely assume," said Mr. Gregg, aloud; nor was this statement contradicted. Even Mr. Gudge, as spokesman for the firm, only ventured on the feeblest of protests, which he presently withdrew. Sir Richard had folded his arms, and, leaning against a pillar, looked sullenly at the ground, and said nothing. His bearing, as even the marquess admitted to himself, was that of a criminal brought to bay. Mr. Gregg waited awhile, perhaps to avoid appearing unduly prejudiced by the demeanor of the accused person, and then continued:—

"This being established, a coroner's inquest, in due course of law, must be held, and a verdict, leading to ultimate proceedings, found as to the cause of death. It will, however, be the immediate duty of the Commission to ascertain, by the usual *post-mortem* examination, whether the appearance of the remains bears out the suspicion of homicidal violence, which has occasioned the appointment of ourselves to inquire into the matter. The body, therefore, if there be no objection, had better be removed to the vestry, where the inspection can take place, and the medical evidence will then guide us as to our next step.

That step, so all anticipated, would surely be the arrest and commitment of Sir Richard Harrington. He was not, as yet, formally in custody, but his every movement was

watched, and his escape impossible. Silver-haired Mr. Tatham, senior in the firm, looked almost as hopeless and bewildered as the marquess himself; but Mr. Gudge, who was by far the younger of the two, kept his presence of mind, and put in a word for his client's supposed interests whenever he got the chance.

The vicar's consent being obtained, the coffin was carried into the vestry, where Dr. Hope, with the three local doctors, entered; the lay members of the Commission remaining where they were, in front of the rifled mausoleum.

Chairs had been brought out for their accommodation, and all sat down, save Sir Richard, who chose to remain in his former attitude, leaning against the pillar, and seeming to pay but slight attention to his legal adviser, Mr. Gudge, who hovered near, and frequently addressed him in a low tone.

The police kept in the background, while the number of spectators, swelled now by servants or hangers-on from the Abbey, rapidly augmented, so that there was soon as dense a congregation as ever mustered there on a fine Sunday in summer.

The marquess kept quite aloof from his brethren of the Commission, and talked to none but Mr. Tatham, whom he knew well. Mavina, whom her father had left in one of the high-backed pews of the chancel near, and who was thus beyond the verge of the flickering torchlight, crouched in a corner, sobbing from time to time, but ever and anon lifting her head, and throwing a keen, anxious glance towards the closed door of the vestry. Mr. Paterson, Major Reynolds, and the Treasury Solicitor conversed in whispers, while Inspector Fielder, ensconced behind a pillar opposite to that against which the baronet leaned, marked every movement of Mr. Gregg's eye, and awaited orders.

Presently the vestry door opened, and Dr. Hope, looking very serious, came forth alone, and joined the little knot of expectant Commissioners. There was some colloquy, and then Mr. Paterson advanced towards the marquess.

"I must ask your lordship," he said, "as a responsible member of this Commission, kindly to give your attention to the report of the medical experts. These gentlemen, also, on Sir Richard's behalf, are quite welcome to hear

what Dr. Hope—whose name, you are perhaps aware, stands very high in his profession—has to tell us.”

In company with Messrs. Tatham and Gudge, the marquess approached the group, and it was towards him that the great doctor turned his beetling brows and piercing eyes as he said—

“We have made a hasty, and I may say a cursory, examination of the remains. The immediate cause of death, in our opinion, was exhaustion consequent on that fell disease, cholera, which was confessedly raging at Futtehpore, just about the time of the death of Sir Lionel, according to his brother’s story, of the same virulent disorder.”

“Then I submit that my client is innocent—demonstrably so!”—put in Mr. Gudge.

The marquess looked as much relieved as if he had received a deputation from the still rebellious colliers of Silverseam, craving peace and amity.

“Not quite!” grimly rejoined Dr. Hope; “unless he can account for a deep gun-shot wound, still imperfectly healed, and therefore of very recent date, in the neighborhood of the right shoulder of the dead man; and the pain and fever caused by which, in that climate, probably predisposed the sufferer to sink beneath a sudden attack of cholera, the germs of which might not impossibly have been lurking in the system at the time of the so-called duel in the jungle.”

“The duel in which, as the diary of his own second avers, ‘H. fired first!’” said Major Reynolds.

“You are quite sure, sir, of what you have just told us?” asked the marquess.

“We are all four quite unanimous, my lord,” replied the surgeon. “The wound from which the probe shows that the ball has not been extracted, must have been caused by a bullet from a large-bored weapon, such as a duelling pistol; certainly not an ordinary revolver. The bleeding must have been considerable, and the treatment, I shall pronounce, careless or unskillful. Its recent date is proved by the fact that the cicatrice remains imperfect.”

Mr. Gregg threw a glance towards watchful Inspector Fielder.

“I am afraid, my lord, after what we have heard, only one course remains to us.”

He drew a folded paper from his breast pocket as he spoke.

"I hold here a warrant, signed by the Secretary of State, for the apprehension of Sir Richard Harrington, on which, I need hardly add, immediate action can be taken ; but which, perhaps, as a matter of etiquette, your lordship, as Lord Lieutenant of the County, will be good enough to indorse. The Commission, as such, has hitherto shown all forbearance and regard for the position of the suspected party ; but now we should not be justified in delaying the execution of the severest part of our mission."

"You will take bail—bail for a large amount ?" said Mr. Gudge, speaking to Mr. Gregg, but looking towards the marquess.

"Not for a moment to be thought of, sir, in such a case as this," peremptorily replied the Solicitor to the Treasury. "I am afraid, Sir Richard, that our duty compels us, in virtue of the authority which I here produce, to tell you to consider yourself in custody."

"In the Queen's name !" softly added Inspector Fielder, at the baronet's elbow ; while another emissary from Scotland Yard glided up on the opposite side.

"Take me to gaol, then, as if I were a common felon !" said Sir Richard, resentfully. "And yet I am innocent."

"We are not your judges," quietly replied Mr. Gregg. "There need be no harshness, no scandal, if it can be avoided. As it is so late, Sir Richard, I see no objection to your spending the rest of the night under your own roof, if you prefer it—of course, with proper precautions, and under the charge of the police. But I think it will be best, even for the sake of your own feelings, to bring this scene to a close."

And to this the baronet yielded a sullen assent.

CHAPTER XXXV.

UNDER ARREST.

SOME of those who had been listening and waiting, with greedy ears and eager eyes, in Greystone church, by the smoky glare of the unaccustomed torchlight, were disappointed that the strange scene of which they had been spectators should not have had an ending ostensibly tragic. They felt as might the crowd in the old Roman arena had the gladiators marched in with sword and shield, with net and trident, with blast of trumpets and brazen clangor of cymbals, and then swept out again without actual bloodshed.

True, a great crime had been brought to light. True, an ancient name had been disgraced, and a man of rank and lofty station dragged down to the level of ordinary offenders. But there had been no harshness, no handcuffs, no attempt at suicide, or resistance to the police.

Detective Inspector Fielder, with Sergeant Flint and their attendant sprites from Scotland Yard, had done their ministering gently. Beyond the utterance of that magic formula "in the Queen's name," there had been no overt arrest. The baronet's very coat sleeve had not been touched by an official finger. He had left the church, to all appearance, as free as the other units of the dispersing crowd, the London police contenting themselves with hovering around him, and keeping near him as he walked away. He was accompanied as far as the Abbey by several of those who had been present at the disinterment of the body of Walter Travis.

With Sir Richard, as in duty bound, went Messrs. Tatham and Gudge, the ornamental and the working partner in the steady-going old firm of family solicitors.

With him, also, marched a party of the county constabulary, commanded by the lieutenant-colonel, who filled the post of Chief Constable of the Shire. Then there were the detectives from London, who knew that the Treasury

Solicitor relied mainly on their vigilance for the safe keeping of the prisoner.

There was also Mr. Gregg himself, who deemed it incumbent on him, so to speak, to reconnoitre the ground, and plant his sentries, before retiring from the scene of action.

The other members of the Commission had not thought it necessary to repair to the neighboring mansion. Mr. Paterson had lingered to say a civil word of apology to the vicar for the trouble he had been compelled to give, and Dr. Hope to issue some orders with respect to the disposal of the coffin and its contents ; but ere long these two, with Major Reynolds and the medical experts, were able to step into the vehicles that were to convey them back to Wortham.

The marquess had gone already. There was an inkstand in the vestry, and with its aid the noble owner of Hurst Royal had most reluctantly appended his signature to the formal warrant for Sir Richard's arrest, and also to a report of the proceedings of the Commission. Then he had entered the carriage that was in waiting for him, and returned to his own home, heavy hearted and malcontent.

Mavina, too, had departed, in company with her father. Very few words were exchanged between them on their homeward drive. Mavina lay back in a corner of the carriage, sobbing at intervals, while honest Robert Malstock was sorely puzzled as to how it behoved him to act or speak. He was, himself, as frank and open as the day, and there was something in his daughter's duplicity that was to him eminently repugnant. He had been proud of his clever girl, and now he began to doubt whether he had not more reason to be ashamed than proud of being the father of so artful a creature.

It had been all a sham, then, the pretence of a pleasant holiday trip to London, and Jemima's invitation a mere blind to lull suspicion to rest, for the accomplishment of a purpose of pure malignity. The good doctor felt hurt and shocked as he thought of this, and yet, somehow, the girl's real grief, the depth and fire of her love for the dead Walter, and of her hatred for his supposed murderer, disarmed his anger. He could not find it in his heart to scold her, so sat silent.

The remainder of the assemblage broke up and returned, either to Wortham or to their own homes in the vicinity, and carried with them the intelligence, soon to spread over the district, of the identification of the corpse last lodged in the stately mausoleum at Greystone, and of the baronet's arrest.

That Sir Richard had committed a terrible crime the popular verdict, anticipating the slower action of a coroner's jury, decided at once. That he must be found guilty before that ancient tribunal, and, ultimately, at the Assizes or at the Central Criminal Court, nobody dared to doubt.

That gunshot wound, coupled with what little had oozed out as to a mock duel or homicidal affray in the depths of an Indian forest, was held conclusive proof against the baronet's innocence. His dogged denial of any knowledge of the murdered man only added to the prejudice against him.

The assertion that he was unacquainted with the very person whose lifeless remains he had fraudulently substituted for those of his brother, was regarded as a mere insult to the understanding of the hearer, be he whom he might.

Sir Richard had not been long enough a resident at Greystone to have won any solid good-will from those who dwelt within a few miles of his park palings. It so happened that he had been, in his father's lifetime, very little at home. Part of his education he had received in Germany; and a military college, and the army, had kept him away from the old north-country mansion, where his elder brother had passed far more of his time than had been the case with the present wearer of the title. And now he seemed to be self-convicted, as it were, of the only crime for which our English justice yet exacts the tremendous penalty of death, since, but for the bringing home of the body of Walter Travis, it would have been most difficult to substantiate the accusation of murder.

It was held that this was an example of the cunning that ends by over-reaching itself, and that the assassin's extreme anxiety to hide the proofs of his guilt had furnished Nemesis with the surest means of bringing him within the clutches of the outraged law.

Meanwhile, the young lord of Greystone, under escort of his captors, and accompanied by the faithful firm of

Crown Street, reached the ancestral mansion, under whose roof, as a matter of favor and not of right, he was to be allowed to sleep—perhaps for the last time.

He had rallied somewhat from the first shock of the change in his position, and contrived, by the time he arrived at the Abbey, to assume a more dignified demeanor than he had been able to exhibit when first misfortune came upon him. With a sad smile, he bade Mr. Gregg welcome to the Abbey. "The house," he said, "and all that it contained, were quite at the service of the official visitor. The key of every room, press, cabinet, or chest should be at Mr. Gregg's disposal should a search for documents be considered necessary. The servants should have instructions to obey the behests of Mr. Gregg's subordinates, and to provide whatever was wanted. Cellar, larder, and bedrooms were all at the command of the police."

"I am too sensible," said Sir Richard, "of your consideration, Mr. Gregg, in treating me with some regard to the position which I occupy, not to afford every facility in my power for the execution of your duty. At the same time I reiterate my protest that I am innocent of that man's blood, and trust that the day may not be far distant when I shall be absolved, even by those who are now loudest in their condemnation."

The hospitality of Greystone Abbey was accepted on behalf of Inspector Fielder and his detectives, and also of the local superintendent and three of his men. And Mr. Gregg, mindful of his official responsibilities, did not decline the proffered keys, somewhat to the disgust of Colonel Lestrangle, the polite Chief Constable, who was not the equal in brain power of the cool Solicitor to the Treasury.

"Don't you see, colonel," explained Mr. Gregg, when he and the Chief Constable at last stepped into the hired carriage that had brought them from the Rose and Crown, to return to Wortham—"don't you see that if I had left the keys in Sir R.'s keeping I might very likely have bungled the whole business? At any rate, he could have burned or made away with whatever compromising letters or papers his drawers or desk may contain, whereas now that they are snugly in charge of that careful inspector from Scotland Yard, I defy him to suppress an inconvenient scrap of evidence of that sort. Not but what I pity him,

I'm sure, since a man of his education must feel all this very keenly."

Left alone with his legal advisers, Sir Richard held a brief conference with Messrs. Tatham and Gudge before they, too, went back to Wortham. It had been arranged that for that night the master of the old Abbey was to remain under his own roof, the police being stationed so as to prevent any possibility of his escape. But on the morrow the law must take its course, although, as Mr. Gudge considerably pointed out, there was no doubt but that every care would be taken to make the baronet's captivity as comfortable as possible, at least until the verdict of the coroner's jury should be given.

That such a verdict should be one of "Wilful murder," even good-natured Mr. Gudge did not venture to disguise from himself or from his senior partner, when at last they had wished their client a "good-night," and were on their road back to the town whence they came.

"I am afraid, in the excited state of public feeling, there can be no hope of a milder finding than that," said the junior member of the legal firm; "but we can move to have the *venue* changed, of course, if, as I fear, there is a trial at bar. A sad thing, isn't it?"

"Yes!" answered old Mr. Tatham, with a shudder; "yes, it's enough, Gudge, I declare, to make poor Sir George turn in his grave! A Harrington in Wortham Gaol!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LORD NORHAM COMES HOME.

THERE were a stir and a flutter in the well-ordered household at Hurst Royal, such as few anticipated events, short of a wedding or a death, could have produced. Lord Norham was coming home, a rare circumstance in itself, and one which was fraught with more interest than generally attaches to the arrival of the heir-apparent to a property and title.

The very servants recognized a difference between the present lord of Hurst Royal and his successor that was to

be. The old marquess had the respect and the liking of his inferiors, and deservedly so, but all who saw him constantly had taken the measure of his intellect, which was respectable but not great, and knew, so to speak, the exact length of his most noble foot. Whereas, Lord Norham was an unknown quantity; and of him, therefore, those who were dependent on the reigning house were somewhat afraid.

Lady Egeria's brother was, indeed, reputed to be an eccentric young nobleman, whose chief characteristic was an indomitable determination to have his own way, and to select his path in life apart from the conventionalities.

The marquess, as was well known, was disappointed in the hopes he had formed for the young man's benefit. What was to be done with a son who was clever enough not only to go into Parliament, but actually to make a figure in the House, and who would not suffer himself to be nominated for an election, and was not to be tempted by the prizes of political life?

It was not only by eschewing St. Stephen's that the future marquess showed the originality of his nature. He kept clear of London drawing-rooms as of the Lobby of the House of Commons, and professed to detest the chatter of the clubs. Yet he was no recluse, and those who had the privilege of knowing him spoke highly of his abilities, and regretted that he chose to keep them outside the glare of publicity. He did not care more for the life of a country gentleman than for the aimless existence of a Belgravian dangler.

Fearless horseman, and dead shot though he was, he laughed at the idea of shooting tame pheasants that it had cost a guinea apiece to rear, and could seldom be coaxed into showing himself in scarlet with Sir Simon's foxhounds.

For farming he cared nothing, whereas his noble father spent some of his happiest hours among prize pigs and shorthorns, and was never weary of descanting on oilcake and mangold wurzel, and the relative fattening powers of barley meal and maize. Yet, Harold Fitzurse was no idler, and had given a hundred proofs of his courage and tenacity of purpose when once his mind was set upon the accomplishment of some purpose. It needs fortitude to play the part of a Moslem Hadji in Arabia or on the borders of Turkestan, and to bow a turbaned head in some especially

sacred mosque, the one Christian among hundreds of fierce fanatics, ready at a word to snatch sabre and dagger from their sheaths, and to redden the holy pavement with the blood of the audacious infidel who dared to counterfeit the actions of a true believer. So it does, on behalf of a hurt comrade, to grapple with a grizzly bear on the edge of some ghastly chasm among the Rocky Mountains, and come off victorious from a struggle in which the odds were all in Bruin's favor.

At any rate, Lord Norham was now coming home for a time, and the marquess was the more pleased at the approaching event because his willful heir had consented to leave his winter quarters in the south of Spain expressly to please his father, still at feud with the stubborn pitmen of Silverseam. There, in spite of some vague concessions on the part of the noble owner of the mine, the strike went on, the idle hands living the while on the proceeds of subscriptions among other collieries of the north.

Now the marquess, though he talked as stoutly of "No Surrender" as a nobleman and a coal-owner need do, longed to be on good terms once more with the recalitrants, even at a sacrifice to himself. He could do nothing with them himself. He had tried argument, and he had been out-crowded by the professional agitators who were the trumpeters of the revolt. He had made appeals to the better feelings of the men, and had failed to touch their hearts, though they laughed good humoredly and shook their heads, for he had not become personally unpopular with those who were trying to coerce him. Now he hoped that his more brilliant son might be more persuasive than he had been.

"I think they would give Harold a hearing, if only because of the odd things he would be sure to say," remarked the marquess to Lady Egeria, more than once; "and, who knows, he might make them hear reason, though I have failed to do it?"

Lady Egeria, who was very fond and proud of her brother, was overjoyed at the prospect of his return, just as she had given up the idea of seeing him for many a month to come. When first she made the acquaintance, in the pleasant summer-tide, of that luckless Sir Richard Harrington, who was now the inmate of a prison awaiting his arraignment on the most serious of the pleas of the Crown,

Lord Norham had been on the coast of Norway in his yacht, the *Moonbeam*. Thence he had scampered to Como, and had next begun to date his letters from the Alhambra, and from places still more out of the way than palatial Granada; such as Ronda, Velez Malaga, and the like. He hinted, too, at a half-formed intention of crossing to Africa, and "cutting-across" from Morocco to Unyoro and Zanzibar, which implied a long adieu to civilization. And here he was, in the most satisfactory way in the world, coming down to Hurst Royal at his father's request, as any other son might have done.

It may be mentioned, incidentally, that as to pecuniary means, Lord Norham was unusually independent. An aunt of his, sister of the late marchioness, had left him a fortune that he called his pocket money, and for three years past he had not accepted the large allowance which the marquess, who was the most liberal of men, pressed upon him.

Lady Egeria, with her pretty cream-colored ponies, and the three liveried infants who belonged to the equipage, drove over to Wortham to meet her brother at the railway station there. It was a bright, fickle day of early spring, all sunshine and showers, and the tender green of the grass and the peeping forth of some coy wild flowers near the hedgerows almost compensated for the leafless trees and brown fallows. The train came in with a rattle and a shriek; nor was it long before a bronzed and bearded gentleman emerged from the station door, and was confronted by the tiny tiger, in top boots and cockaded hat, who had just jumped down from behind the basket carriage.

"What's that, my little fellow, about her ladyship?" said the new comer in reply to the child in the cockaded hat. "My sister here, eh? All right; I see the carriage."

Lord Norham turned to give his own servant, who followed him, and who by his swarthy face and gold earrings, was presumably a foreigner, some brief directions as to his luggage, and then hastened forward to take Lady Egeria's little hand between his own strong ones.

"Come to fetch me, I conclude? That's nice of you, and I'll get in if my weight isn't too much for this Cinderella equipage of yours and the cream-colored mice that

Lord Norham suited the action to the word, and the light carriage rolled off promptly towards Hurst Royal.

"So glad to see you, and so kind of you to come," said Lady Egeria, quite effusively for her.

"Well, I don't know about that. I always feel, you know, when I do return, as if some of you must be remembering the parable of the Prodigal," said Lord Norham, who was a stalwart young man, six years older than Lady Egeria, and utterly unlike her, and as utterly unlike his father, though with a strong resemblance to some of the cavaliers among the Fitzurse family portraits in the picture gallery. He was as dark as a Spaniard, with a black, crisp beard, and the eye of a hawk.

"Yes, you have been a sad truant," rejoined his sister, playfully; "but we must not scold you now that we have got you back with us again. I thought you would never tear yourself away from Norway, and the salmon, and the reindeer, and the fells and fiords, or whatever they are."

"Yes, I knocked about the coast as long as the setting in of the fogs would let me," answered her brother, philosophically—"I like Norway. Near as it is, the wandering Cockney has not spoiled either the sport or the natives as yet, and one may say as much for the quaint old villages and towns that I have just left among the Andalusian Sierras. How is my father? Well, I know he is, in the flesh, but sorely plagued in spirit, if I may believe what he wrote to me, by these obstinate gnomes of the Silverseam pit."

"I don't think papa would have minded their treatment of him so much," returned Lady Egeria in an undertone, "but he has been greatly grieved by what has lately come to light amongst us here—at Greystone, I mean," she added, softly. "You have heard of it, Harold?"

"Ah, yes; I read the newspapers when within reach of them," answered her brother, "and can't quite shut my ears, too, against tattlers when I spend a day or two in London; so I am tolerably posted up in the details of that unlucky business. I'm sorry, too, for I knew and liked Lionel, poor fellow. As for Sir Richard, I think I saw him once, and thought him a bad copy of his brother, with all the chivalry left out, and a double share of smooth-faced plausibility instead, though it may seem ill-natured to criticize him now he is in trouble."

"He saved my life," said Lady Egeria, softly; "and I have tried to like him and think well of him, and have never encouraged those who swelled the cry against him. And yet Harold, there was always something in his bearing that I could not fathom, and did not trust, with all my desire to be his friend. I cannot, however, believe that he really did the horrid deed they tax him with."

"You mean the murder? No, not perhaps quite that, but I am afraid the act came very close upon deliberate murder, even if there was a duel scuffled up, in some informal way, in the jungle," replied Lord Norham. "Of course, the worst feature of the whole case, and the one that has laid hold of the public fancy, is his bringing home of the poor wretch's remains as those of his brother. Why, you are crying, Egeria! We ought not to talk of ugly stories like this, since they upset your nerves so much."

"It is nothing—nothing, dear; and I was foolish," answered his sister, bravely keeping back her tears. "You have been in India, Harold, have you not, in the course of your wanderings?"

"Just for a bit—some pigsticking in the Deccan and a raid against tigers in the Terai," replied Lord Norham, evidently surprised at the abruptness of the question. "I prefer my Burra Shikar, as they call the pursuit of great game, in Africa or America, and am indeed disposed to regard the royal Bengal tiger as an impostor, unwilling to give sportsmen a peep at his striped skin. But what made you ask?"

"Because—because—oh, Norham, you will laugh at me," pleaded Lady Egeria, with a quivering lip, "and yet I *have* a reason for what is in my thoughts. Did it never occur to you as possible—probable, even, Harold, dear—that, India being what it is, Sir Richard's elder brother, Sir Lionel Harrington, may be still living?"

These last words were uttered almost in a gasp, as if with painful effort, while the speaker's beautiful eyes were turned eagerly, beseechingly, towards the bronzed face of her brother.

"Lionel Harrington alive! How can that be possible?" replied Lord Norham, slowly. "I thought the poor fellow had perished in that skirmish with robbers in the forest. Pity, perhaps, that the mischief did not happen to the younger instead of the elder of the two, but, at any rate, I supposed it to be proved!"

“Nothing is proved!” responded Lady Egeria, more earnestly than before. “The proof, Harold, on which we—on which all the world—relied, has just been found out, you see, to be fallacious. Nobody ventures to assert that the body buried at Greystone was really that of Sir George’s eldest son and heir. And, that being so, I see no reason why we should be sure that poor Sir Lionel is not alive.”

“Woman’s wit!” muttered Lord Norham, between his bearded lips, and then threw a quick glance at the lovely, eager face of his usually impassive sister, and probably drew his own deductions from what he heard and saw. For the space of half a minute, perhaps, he kept silence, turning over the matter in his mind, and then said, very gently for him, “Upon my word, Egeria, there may be something in your idea, wild as it sounded at the first. Mind, though, I only say there may,” he added, as he marked the heightened color and the brightness of the eyes in her to whom he spoke, “for all the likelihood, I fear, goes the other way. Yet such a thing might be. India is not England—some centuries behindhand, at the least; and I, though the least romantic of mankind, freely admit that truth is stranger than any fiction which the circulating libraries can supply. I’ll take time to think of it, my dear, and tell you my opinion later on. I, for one, shall be heartily glad of the prospect, I know, of shaking Lionel Harrington once more by the hand. But here we are! How unaltered the old place looks, to be sure!”

For at that moment the pretty equipage passed through the park gates, where the lodgekeeper and her children stood curtsying and bobbing welcome to the returned heir, and sped along under the shadow of the giant oaks of the stately avenue that led up to the mansion of Hurst Royal, worthy gift of a crowned king to the brave and loyal race that had possessed it for so many hundred years in the long past.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN THE COLLIERY DISTRICT.

ON the other side of Wortham, remote from Hurst Royal and the blue hills and burns and trout streams that lay beyond, the country seemed to change its nature, and to become unpicturesque, flat, and even ugly. There were brown moors alternating with rush-grown meadows ; straggling villages, in which the older dwellings were of loose flat stones, and the newer of grimy brick ; cinder paths across the fields ; grim pit mouths, surrounded by banks of coal or coke ; short chimneys, whence gushed forth yellow flame and black smoke ; tall chimneys towering on high and darkening the sky with thick vapors.

It was not a district to attract a stranger to take up his residence within its boundaries, but such as it was, the colliers who inhabited it were fond of it somehow, and would have found themselves less at home in a region far more favored by Nature and embellished by art. Here lay, among others, the great Silverseam coal mine, the scene of a strike that had now been going on for the better part of a year ; and here, too, was the model village of Swaffham Saxby—to be distinguished from Swaffham Regis, nearer to Wortham—rebuilt at great outlay by the present Marquess of Cheviot, and which boasted of the neatest houses and best plots of garden ground in all the neighborhood.

There was a bustle in the village for a meeting was to be held at the Miners' Arms, the great room of which would accommodate even the large gathering that was expected ; for Lord Norham had announced his intention of addressing his father's recalcitrant pitmen ; and of the heir to the marquissate the colliers knew just enough to whet their curiosity, and so were pretty certain to attend in strong force. And other persons were to be present who came to play a part as alien as possible to that of the peacemaker, and who had no wish that the great strike should come to an end so soon.

The Silverseam mine had been selected to be closed, chiefly, as it would seem, because of the semifeudal relations that had hitherto existed between the noble coal-owner and the sturdy gnomes whose labor made his mineral wealth a source of profit to the world at large.

The marquess was their landlord as well as their employer, and had been proud and glad to be their patron and their friend, while they, on their part, had cherished a traditional affection for the House of Fitzurse, a feeling that dated from long ago, and that had borne fruit in the old strife between King and Parliament, when the then Marquess of Cheviot had easily raised a regiment for the Royal cause.

The decree of the Trade Union to which most of the Silverseam men belonged had been obeyed, and it was now some nine months since the underground galleries had become silent and deserted, and since not so much as an ounce of coal had been extracted from the black depths of the famous mine.

The warfare had been mildly conducted, but stubborn on both sides. The marquess had eschewed harsh measures, such as eviction or stoppage of subscriptions to schools, infirmary, blanket club, and the like. The colliers had abstained from riot and trespass, and had spared the marquess' game preserves as they had respected his poultry yard. But they had held out for unreasonable terms, and had been encouraged in their resistance by trained agitators, whose salaries were paid by the Associated Unions. Some of these were to be at the Miners' Arms that day, to neutralize to the best of their power any effect that Lord Norham might produce upon his hearers.

The meeting was a crowded one. Never had the white-washed walls of the great room, used for festive purposes and for musical entertainments, as well as for political or quasi-political gatherings, contained a more closely-packed mass of humanity. None but men were present, the lads forming a fringe around the door and in front of the red-curtained windows, while the women and girls stood in knots beside the palings of the nearest gardens or the honeysuckle-draped hedges that lined the road.

On the platform, raised a foot or two above the dense array of the audience, were two distinct groups. With

Lord Norham was the marquess' agent, Mr. Norris, and Mr. Bates, the manager, or so-called "butty," of the mine, and two other good men and true, sub-overseers, or "doggies" in mining parlance, and Mr. Gudge, the Wortham solicitor from Crown Street, and the rector of the parish, and one or two more.

The other, and smaller group, comprised two or three ringleaders of the malcontents, the editor of a Coalport newspaper, and two personages who had hurried down from London to buckle on their armor for the wordy fray, and who were understood to earn their living by fishing in the troubled waters which it was their aim in life to keep troubled.

One of these was a young man, slightly deformed, and with a pale, thoughtful face, delicate features, and fiery eyes—an enthusiast this, newly enlisted by the Unions in their crusade against capitalists. There was this to be said for Mr. Withers, that he really did believe in his mission and himself, and was quite sincere, even when he talked glib nonsense.

The case was widely different with the big, burly agitator, whose coarse red face and stentorian voice contrasted so thoroughly with those of his better-educated ally, and who had been a prize-fighter, had been a "knock out" auctioneer, horse dealer, low comedian, and buffo vocalist, before he took to his present calling. He had inches enough, and impudence enough to be conspicuous anywhere, and his name, well-known among the colliers of the north, was Cowall.

Mr. Withers, from London, led off. When he began to speak he coughed a good deal, and his voice was thin, and his manner unimpressive. But as he grew animated and warmed to his work, he seemed another man. His eye brightened; his voice rang out sonorous and stirring as a trumpet call; there came a hectic flush to his wan cheek; and he waxed eloquent, scornful, bitter, and persuasive, pouring out a perfect hail shower of well-chosen words.

What he said was not new, the old declamation about selfish rich men and the poor, rough-handed sons of toil; pretty much what used to be said in bad Latin at the Mons Sacer when Rome's working men mutinied against senator and politician. But he put his soul into what he

said. He really meant it. When he declared that Capital was a fungus, and the capitalist a bloodsucker, he was as honestly fervent as if he had been a novel Peter the Hermit preaching to Europe to rush to the conquest of the Holy Sepulchre from the turbaned infidel. And when he had finished, and stood panting for breath—for his lungs were weak—Lord Norham astonished his own supporters and his opponents by crossing the platform to offer his own strong right hand to the grasp of the feeble digits of the orator.

“I like—excuse me, Mr. Withers—to shake hands with a man who means what he says, as you so evidently do,” said the young lord.

Then Mr. Cowall stepped forward. He was an old favorite with the pitmen, or, perhaps, it would be truer to say that every man there fancied that every other man had a high opinion of the Deputy Head Centre from London. His speech was not by any means as brilliant as that of his sickly young friend, but it produced a greater effect than that oration, which had been viewed as a sort of intellectual fireworks. Mr. Cowall did not, to use his own habitual expression, shoot over his hearers' heads. He was strong, but he was homely. He had nothing new to say, but he had the knack of making the old themes sound original; could use a proverb or a scrap of slang with telling effect; and knew how to be personal without being outrageously offensive.

He had his joke about the marquess, who, he said, was a worthy old nobleman, no doubt, who had a sort of grandmotherly regard for those beneath him, and so would keep them all their lives in leading strings. And he had his fling at the future marquess, there present, as one who had been born with a gold spoon in his mouth, and therefore wanted others to take what they could get and be thankful, but who never in his life had done a stroke of work, or been of the remotest use to England or to those around him any more than if he had been a caterpillar crawling on a cabbage leaf. What did “my lord” know about English working men or their wants; he, whose time had been spent—time and money too, no doubt—broadcast, in foreign parts: he (Mr. Cowall) would not say in frivolity and dissipation, like so many of his order, but still wasted; and what was the worth of his advice to those who had to earn their bread by honest labor?

These and other things, jocose, denunciatory, sarcastic, did Mr. Cowall enunciate with all the force of his lungs, and certainly he raised a laugh more than once, and was often rewarded by a deep hum of assent, and once by cheers.

Then Lord Norham spoke, and every ear was bent to listen to his words, which were worth the hearing. The speech he made was long—when, since the days of Demosthenes, was a born orator short-winded?—but no one there would have been tired of hearkening to it had its length been double.

By some happy knack he had contrived from the outset to rivet the attention of the crowd—to make his hearers feel themselves at home with him; and then he went on, winning their trust in spite of all the efforts that had been made to inspire prejudice against him, and finding his way, somehow, to convince their understandings by touching their hearts.

He, too, could be satirical when he pleased, and many of those present rubbed their eyes and shook themselves uneasily, as if to ascertain that they were really awake, as Lord Norham brushed away, like cobwebs, the fallacies that had been made to pass for sterling truth, and showed how puerile were the pretexts for the strife between master and men.

He, too, could be graphic, and there were murmurs, re-echoed with sobs by the women without, as he spoke of children's rosy faces growing pale and thin, of empty cupboards and cold hearths, as the rocks that loomed ahead, should the strike go on. And then he warmed into a glow of manly kindness, and held out the olive branch, on his father's behalf, as the marquess never could have done, and, amidst great and repeated cheering, struck while the iron was hot and got the terms of peace accepted by the meeting at large.

There was much rejoicing at Hurst Royal when Lord Norham returned, somewhat late, from Swaffham Saxby, bringing the news of his peaceful victory. And, after dinner, when the servants had left the room, the marquess seemed to care for no other topic of conversation.

"I thought, Harold, my boy, that you could hammer reason into those hard heads of theirs if any one could," said the old nobleman: "yet there was the fear all along

that they might hoot you down, or drown your voice, as they did mine."

"I was lucky," said Lord Norham, modestly; "perhaps the novelty of the thing induced them to be patient with me."

"And that was a great hit," pursued the marquess, "when you made them wince by pointing out that, so far from asserting their independence, they were catspaws after all, for the Associated Unions to make use of to pull the chesnuds out of the fire. Our north-country hands hate to be viewed as puppets for wire pullers from the south, like Withers and Cowall, and the wiser clique of managers that keep unseen. And Cowall, bully as he is, seems to have met his match, and a little more, to-day."

"Well, I took him by surprise, you see," said Lord Norham, cracking a walnut, and speaking almost apologetically for the defeated champion of the hostile party. "As he had called me useless, I thought it was but fair to play up to his lead. So I challenged him, since we two seemed to be the biggest men in the room, to go down Silverseam Pit, with umpires, and try which could do the best day's work at coal hewing with pick and shovel for twenty pounds a side. And he funk'd it—as we Eton boys used to say—and wouldn't agree, but grew redder than ever, and the doggies laughed, and said they'd back 'my lord' for a fiver apiece to win the wager; and then the miners began to laugh too, and after that they and I were the best of friends."

"And would you really have done it, Harold?" asked Lady Egeria, laughingly: "you, who never handled such tools, I suppose, in your life?"

"To be sure I would," answered Lord Norham, tranquilly, as he picked his walnut; "my muscles, thanks to an athlete's life, are in better condition than those of Mr. Cowall, who is a mere agitator, and earns a living by his tongue instead of his arms. Anyhow, the offer of such a trial by battle did good."

There was, indeed, a load taken off the mind of the marquess by what he heard. Not only was he relieved from the burthen of that internecine struggle with his hereditary colliers which had vexed his kind heart for many a day, but he felt as though his heir were restored to him. No doubt, after his success of that day, and his evident

enjoyment in it, Lord Norham would remain in England now, and take a growing interest in the great estate that he was eventually to inherit.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NOBLE CAPTIVE.

FAR away from England, far away from Europe, the bright sunbeams danced and quivered on the gilded trellis work that covered a window, unglazed, but which could be closed at night by tightly-fitting shutters of polished wood. The window, like most Oriental windows, was high up in the wall, so that it was impossible to look forth from it unless the gazer stood near it ; and through it came the dull hum of the bees, and the liquid plashing of the fountain, the jet of which sprang high into the sunshine, and then fell in a shower of diamond drops into a marble basin, around which roses bloomed. The room itself, with its slender pillars of fluted marble, the gay arabesques on the walls, the Saracenic arches of golden honeycomb work, the Persian carpet on the floor, and the divan covered with rich stuff of a dull crimson, was pretty enough. But to the eyes of its solitary occupant it had come to be hateful indeed ; as hateful as the most squalid cell in some prison of Spain or Russia, where modern philanthropy has not yet gained a hearing.

The lonely dweller in this decorated room was pacing to and fro, from the carved and painted alcove which contained his bed, half hidden by a curtain of silk, to the tall and narrow window, with its dainty lattice work of iron, overlaid with gold leaf, tarnished by time, as were also the gorgeous Moorish arches, the carpet from Shiraz, and the costly stuff of which consisted the drapery of the divan.

He was a young man, tall and fair to look upon, with features and complexion that were clearly those of a European, though the handsome dress he wore, of white and scarlet, was Oriental in style and material, and was sewn with seed pearl and silver thread, as were also the velvet slippers which encased his feet. It was such a garb as in the East is only worn by a person of rank, and the sole

difference in this case was that the wearer's head was bare, without cap or turban, and that the striped girdle around his waist contained no dagger.

The room itself was furnished with tables, stools, and other articles of Indian workmanship, but with nothing European save a large clock fastened to the wall, and that ticked monotonously, as if to keep time to the ceaseless splash of the fountain without. There were no books ; no writing materials. A large silver-mounted hookah stood neglected in a corner, and a collection of pipes, Turkish and Persian, cumbered the shelves, but that was all, except some porcelain jars filled with flowers.

"Is this to last for ever?" asked the prisoner, impatiently, as he interrupted his walk and stood, as if irresolute, in the centre of the room. "Am I doomed to mope and pine for ever in this gilded cage, mocked by the respectful silence of those whom alone I have to deal with, mere passive instruments of the treacherous tyrant whom they obey? Oh, for an English face, the wholesome sound of Christian voices, the freedom that I never valued till it was lost, my career, my country, and my home! How I loathe this life of forced inaction, the long dull hours of the weary day, the very sound of yonder fountain as its spray falls back into the bubbling water beneath! Yet I am treated, for a captive, with a singular deference and attention. Every day they load my table with dishes, the very names of which are unknown to me, and offer me rare fruits and strange sweetmeats, and give me wine, and choice tobacco, and even opium. But they will tell me nothing—not the reason for my being brought here—not my offence, real or imaginary, against their master—and in vain I crave an interview with that master, whose arbitrary will shackles me to this spot.

"It grows late," added the lonely tenant of the room, after a glance at the clock; "later, far, than the hour at which they come, day after day, to lead me out for exercise in yonder garden, screened by walls, where prying eyes cannot behold me as I pace the paths, among the gorgeous flowers, and the terraces inlaid with many-colored marble, and that fountain, dancing in the flickering light of the declining sun. How well I have learned to know every shrub and tree and flower bed, and the dusky lineaments of the two guards, standing by the

door, with loaded carbines, and sabres swinging at their sides ! How used have I grown to the obsequious meekness of the white-robed servants, who dog my steps, and watch my every movement, and yet profess to be my humble slaves, ready to do my bidding, but mute as death itself when I demand who dares to keep an Englishman in durance here !

“ There are signs, however, which point to some break, some change in the cruel, odious sameness of this death in life of mine ; and welcome should it be, were it to direst peril, even to death itself, were I once convinced that liberty was gone for ever. And that reminds me that a chance remains.”

From behind one of the porcelain vases that held flowers he drew a piece of charcoal, and with it proceeded to write upon the smooth, milk-white chunam, or cement made from pounded sea shells, hard as marble itself, of the wall nearest to him. Line after line he traced, in rough, bold letters, when suddenly the clank of steel and the sound of booted feet in the corridor without made him start. He left off writing, and restored the piece of charcoal to its former hiding place, but almost at the same instant the door opened, and several figures became visible. The first face that the prisoner beheld was the keen, dark countenance of the man who acted as head gaoler, and who raised his hands to his turban with the usual signs of outward deference. Behind him came two other servants, while four troopers, fierce, swarthy fellows, armed to the teeth, brought up the rear.

“ Salaam, Sahib—you must condescend to come with us—such are the orders of our lord ! ” said the chief of the party, bending his supple spine, and smiling in a deprecatory fashion.

“ Whither ? ” demanded the captive, with a searching look ; “ not to the garden, as usual, I conclude. Has your master—— ”

“ His august name must not be breathed,” exclaimed the native, still speaking in Hindustani, as indeed the Englishman had done. “ Here, Vasna Vi, give the Feringhee what you have brought ; he will need it for the sun’s rays, since, Sahib, we are going to ride.”

After an instant’s hesitation, the prisoner took the helmet of white felt, with a puggaree of muslin wound round

it, which was offered him, and followed the guards as they tramped down the long corridor, and down a narrow and winding staircase of stone that he knew well. Instead of opening the side door that led into the garden, the soldiers strode on, turning to the left, and traversing passage after passage, cloister after cloister, till, suddenly, a door, studded with huge nails, was thrown open, and the sunlight poured in. To right and left arose the lofty walls and towers of the palace fortress, but in front were the tall trees and dense undergrowth of the jungle. Between the buildings and the forest stood a number of horses, equipped for the road, and, so soon as the captive emerged from the doorway, some ten or twelve armed troopers swung themselves into their saddles, while the steeds intended for the rest of the party were led forward by bare-footed Syces, ready girded for a journey.

"This," said the man who acted as head gaoler, pointing to a white horse richly caparisoned, "is the horse meant for the Sahib's use. He goes well, and is of Arab blood, and worthy of such a rider."

For a moment—it was only for a moment—the prisoner stood as if in doubt. Then, as he surveyed the preparations, and counted the sixteen swarthy troopers of the escort, he saw the hopelessness either of resistance or of eluding the vigilance of his captors.

Without a word of remonstrance, he grasped the flowing mane of the fine horse that was led up for him, and sprang into the deep saddle, with its shovel stirrups, while instantly the mounted guards closed around him, so as to cut him off from any possible contact with the outer world.

Then the word was given to march, and, with the swiftly-running attendants keeping pace with the horses, the little column of riders struck into the darkling forest road and soon disappeared amidst the tangled vegetation of the jungle.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FLIGHT.

THE crisis at Futtehpore, long expected, both by the Supreme Government of India and the vassal prince, had come at last. For weeks and months there had been what continental newspapers describe as a state of tension between the English authorities and Amarat Rao. And of late the relations betwixt the Rajah and the British Resident accredited to his Court had been strained and unfriendly to a degree.

It was matter of notoriety that the prince's deposition had been all but decided upon by the higher powers, and it was equally well known that his real offence was that of inciting other chiefs to conspire with him against the English Raj.

But a native ruler is never taxed with political misdeeds when he can be arraigned on the safer ground of oppression, and Amarat Rao's misrule was quite enough to warrant his dethronement, or even the annexation of his country to the British dominions.

The fiat, however, had gone forth that the example to be made at Futtehpore might be of a milder sort. Amarat Rao's sway must cease, but some obscure scion of the reigning house, likely to prove amenable to official advice, might be set up in his place. And the present prince would henceforth have to subsist, as a state prisoner, on a pension adapted to his rank.

Amarat Rao was too wary and subtle to be taken by surprise. Already he had made certain arrangements with a view to the coming mischief. His spies and scouts were everywhere, and there was little business transacted at the Residency without its nature being known in the palace. And now emissary after emissary came hurrying in, bringing tidings that left no doubt of the imminence of the catastrophe.

The worst that could be feared was about to happen.

The Resident had himself visited the cantonments, and conferred repeatedly with the general in command. The telegraph was constantly at work. Reinforcements were supposed to be on their road to Futtehpore, and the whole camp was in a state of stir and bustle that boded no good to the ruler who had incurred the hostility of the Government.

Amarat Rao's mind had long been made up as to the course to be pursued. His trusted servants hastily packed up treasure and jewels and other valuable property that could be readily moved, while vague rumors of projected resistance were set afloat in the Bazaar, and soon, as had been anticipated, reached the ears of the Resident and of the military authorities. Nor was such resistance, however rash, quite beyond the range of probability.

The Rajah, like other Indian princes, had his private army: a costly toy in time of peace, but capable of proving dangerous at a period of commotion. He had his camp, even as the British brigade that watched him had theirs, and in it were horse, foot, and artillery to a respectable amount. To hoist the red flag of revolt might be a desperate act, but it was one to which such a one as Amarat Rao might be tempted. Wherefore it was thought best to avoid hurry, and to await the arrival of reinforcements before taking a decisive step.

The reinforcements were near now. The long column on its march raised clouds of dust that were discernible afar off, and mounted messengers came spurring in with the tidings of its approach. The Rajah had no intention of waiting till the coming thunderstorm should break on his devoted head. He had by degrees withdrawn from the camp the most trustworthy of his soldiers, picked men on whom he could rely in adversity. His stables had been emptied to provide sufficient steeds for the flitting that was projected. His favorite wives, his children, and other non-combatants, were to accompany him in horse litters, escorted by the troopers of his body guard, and by a few of the choicest troops of all arms, under the command of the bravest of his sirdars.

Although the Rajah had determined upon flight, he had no wish that his departure, or his preparations, should be known to his enemies. Accordingly, a chain of sentinels had been formed between the palace and the town, with

strict orders to shoot or cut down all who might try to pass in the direction either of the Bazaar or the English cantonments. Meanwhile the place itself was full of noise, bustle, and confusion. The echoes of its silent arcades and deserted halls were thoroughly awakened now. Everywhere resounded the clash of steel, the clink of accoutrements, the tramp of booted feet, the sound of hammers, and the incessant babble of eager voices.

If many were to share the flight of the prince, many, so the despot had willed it, were to stay behind to screen that flight and delay the pursuers as much as possible.

Amarat Rao's orders had been issued for a stubborn, if passive, defense of the palace. The vast building was to hold out to the last moment practicable. Every door and gate, every postern and window, was to be barricaded. The drawbridges over the moat, now dry, were to be raised, should their rusty chains not prove recalcitrant. The old cannon on the battlements, the old matchlocks in the turrets, were to be furbished up to make as brave a display as might be when the besiegers should appear. Of course a struggle was hopeless and useless, but there might seem, at least, to be the design to fight to the last, and that, at any rate, would gain time for the escape of the selfish tyrant who was the master of all.

The preparations were at last complete. The riders of the escort, swarthy Mahrattas and fierce-eyed Moham-medans, were mounted. The few foot soldiers and men of the artillery who had been chosen to follow the fortunes of their prince had marched. The horse-litters, with their veiled occupants, pleased with whatever broke the tedious sameness of harem life had moved forward. So had the long array of tent bullocks and elephants, equipped with velvet howdahs and rich saddle cloths, and dark-skinned coolies, carrying the long bamboos to which packages were strapped.

Not a courtier was there, no pompous Vizier, no solemn Kazi, no smug placeholder of any sort. There was the one sirdar who had been selected to command the handful of chosen troops. And there were two or three grim Moham-medan nobles, who hated the British so heartily that they were ready to be true even to a pagan prince who was a foe to the Christians.

And then Amarat Rao came forth with a brow of gloom,

but with a flash of fierce resentment in his dark eyes, splendidly dressed, as was his wont, and sprang unaided into his gold-embossed saddle.

Then the cavalcade moved off, disappearing at last among the glades of the forest, in the same direction as that taken, some forty-eight hours before, by the English captive and his guards and gaolers.

CHAPTER XL.

THE WRITING ON THE CHUNAM WALL.

THE hot sunshine of morning gilded the palm groves of the plain, and threw a yellow lustre over the tops of the tall trees on the confines of the hoary forest, but its rays had no power to penetrate the screen of dense and tangled vegetation that lay beneath.

Nestling amidst the darkling shades of its sylvan solitude, the very palace seemed to sleep in sullen repose, soon to be rudely broken.

Faintly at the first, then more distinctly, came the noise of the advance. Very gradual was the approach of the threatening sounds : swelling, deepening, growing louder, and reverberating through the silent glades of the jungle.

Thud ! thud ! went the horses' hoofs on the soft and swampy turf, enamelled with small flowerets and rare ferns, and this sound mingled with the martial clatter of accoutrements, the braying of trumpets, and the crash of the artillery, as the weight of guns and tumbrils was forced with difficulty through the bush and briar, and in the midst of the matted undergrowth which bordered the narrow paths.

They are coming, coming at last, these English foes, so audaciously defied, and that in force enough to bring to his senses the contumacious vassal who had dreamed of bringing back the old period of misrule and petty warfare to which conquerors of our own race, from Clive to Havelock, put an end.

The whole brigade was in motion. The reinforcements, freshly arrived, had been made use of to invest the Rajah's camp and to keep order in the Bazaar, where shops were

closed and seething masses of natives, often with weapons at their sides, blocked the narrow streets.

The prince's small army had submitted, without a blow being struck, to such conditions as the British authorities thought fit. Their leaders had made no attempt at encouraging a futile resistance. The tide of war rolled on towards the Rajah's palace, where it was understood that all had been got ready for a desperate defense. That the old walls were strong, all knew, and there is notoriously no predicting when Orientals may be expected to fight to the death. It had been thought best, then, to crush resistance by the pressure of irresistible numbers.

On came the brigade, in long array, through the shadowy vistas and sombre thickets of the immemorial wood. The shrill notes of the cavalry trumpets awoke the echoes, and were followed by the deep, menacing roll of the drums and the firm, quick tramp of advancing infantry. The silence, so far as the human voice was concerned, in which the movement of so many armed men was conducted, was in itself to the highest degree impressive. The stern steadiness of our English discipline prevented the babble of tongues so common on exciting occasions in continental Europe. Except for a hoarse word of command at intervals, nothing was said.

Meanwhile, within the palace itself, all was clamor, confusion, and dismay. The line of sentinels planted to cut off communication between the fortress and the town had retreated at the first signs of the hostile approach, and the news they had brought seemed to have struck terror into every heart. Yet there were efforts made to carry out the positive orders of the fugitive prince, and to defend the palace and the women to the last.

Hurriedly the gates and doors were locked and barred, the many narrow windows blocked with casks filled with earth and sandbags, and barricades built up at the points considered most vulnerable to an attacking force.

On the tall ramparts and in the towers that studded the curtain wall, there were bustle and activity. Old cannon of every conceivable date and calibre, and some of which had probably been founded as long ago as the glorious reign of Aurungzebe, showed their brass or bronze mouths from antique embrasures. From turret loopholes and arrow slits were thrust forth the gleaming barrels of por

tentously long matchlocks, not to be despised when there was cover for the ambushed marksmen. And it was no secret that the palace contained many foot soldiers, armed with English rifles of the newest pattern, and who had only to stand firm to cause much useless bloodshed before they should be finally overpowered.

At last the advancing troops had poured forth from the forest and proceeded to surround the doomed dwelling. The tamarind groves, the orchards of orange, peach, almond, and date trees were full of soldiers now. The cavalry were drawn up beside the huge tank, bordered with polished granite, and the guns were planted so as to breach if necessary, the thick walls of the palace fortress.

From within there came confusedly to the ears of the besiegers the uproar that prevailed among the defenders of the place, but they were far from appreciating the exact nature of the scene inside. The bewildered Orientals, deserted by their lord, run hither and thither, distractedly trying to execute his commands given on the previous day, but without a chief to put himself at the head. The soldiers, in hall and courtyard, stood huddled together, like sheep in presence of wolves. Their officers no longer flourished their tulwars, and the pallor and trepidation of the armed mob gave scanty promise of a vigorous attempt to hold out. The servants, weeping or uttering imprecations and prayers alternately, ran hither and thither, while the inmates of the harem, realizing for the first time the position, added their piercing shrieks to a din that was already deafening.

A flag of truce was sent forward, on the besiegers' part, with a peremptory summons to surrender in the name of the Queen-Empress of India. But there was no response whether of submission or defiance—nothing but a medley of hideous noises ; while from the turrets and battlements not a shot was fired, though turbaned heads and the glitter of gun barrels and the gaping mouths of cannon were visible at every aperture.

There was a brief delay, and then the music of the regimental bands struck up cheerily, and the shrill notes of the Highlanders' bagpipes rang out in unison with the sounds of brazen instruments and the beating of drums.

Next came the word to advance. The neglected draw-

bridges had been found impossible to raise, and therefore the weedgrown moat long dry, was crossed without difficulty.

Then came the real attack. The butt ends of the soldiers' firelocks and the axes of the pioneers resounded on the doors, which were presently demolished, as were the barricades, hastily erected, that had been set up ; and as an entrance was forced, the yells of the natives and the wild screams of the immured women swelled the chorus of frantic noises that prevailed.

Still, not a shot was fired on either side. The groaning doors were beaten down beneath the heavy blows of the assailants, the barricades fell crashing under the strokes of the axe, but not so much as a spluttering discharge of musketry burst forth from within the invaded fortalice.

With a cheer the troops rushed in, and there was an immediate stampede, in an opposite direction, of the would-be defenders of the stronghold. With cries of "Amaun ! Amaun !" the frightened creatures fell on their knees, imploring mercy and quarter, while louder still, from the harem, came the shrieks of the alarmed women, and the armed men threw down their guns and shields and scimitars, and greeted their advancing foes with salaams and abject entreaties for pardon, answered with roars of laughter from the victors, who now perceived that their triumph was an easy one indeed, and the defense unworthy of the name.

As usual there was some little discretion necessary, on the part of the officers, to prevent indiscriminate plunder or wanton mischief, either on the part of the straggling soldiers, or of the camp followers, who soon crowded in ; but the men were in good humor, and discipline was well preserved.

It was not until the occupation of the palace was completed, and the babel of sounds had somewhat subsided, that the real state of the case was known, and Amarat Rao's flight, with his wives and treasures and the best and bravest of his people, eventually discovered.

Then indeed the general in command felt a little pardonable irritation at the trick which had been played. All the resources of the British military power had been called into requisition, merely to surprise what was really an untenable post. The bird had flown, and only the

empty nest remained. There had been no resistance, and there was therefore no one to be punished. The semblance of armed rebellion against the Supreme Government of which Amarat Rao's subjects had been guilty was readily condoned,

Whither the Rajah had fled remained a mystery for the moment. Even in that time of terror his servants' lips remained sealed as to the refuge to which their master had betaken himself.

There was no violence, no pillage. The crestfallen captives and their guards were allowed to slink away unmolested, leaving their arms on the ground. The guns on the ramparts were spiked, the matchlock men dismissed, and the bags of powder lying about were placed in safe keeping.

Then it became necessary to calm the agitation of the shrieking ladies and their slaves in the zenana, and this, with due attention to Eastern etiquette, consumed some time. At last, however, an officer, who spoke the language of India well, was admitted to an outer room of the harem, and there met a deputation of its occupants, to whom, in the general's name, he offered assurances of protection and respect.

Then the screaming ceased, and presently some dusky servants bearing trays were sent out to offer sweetmeats and sherbet to the English sahibs, as a mark of the feminine gratitude of those within.

There were other cares, however, incumbent on the visitors. A search had to be made, in a quiet way, for treasonable correspondence, as well as for ammunition and treasure, in case the Rajah should not have had time for or opportunity of removing all that could be connected with the plot which was his real offence.

In the execution of this last duty, Lord Alfred Mortimer, as one of the officers selected to discharge it, was going from room to room, with a party of his hussars in attendance, when the sergeant who accompanied him suddenly threw open the door of a large and richly-decorated chamber at the very extremity of a neglected corridor, where cobwebs of giant size almost hid the carved and gilded cornices and pilasters.

There is no need to describe the room itself, which was that so recently inhabited by the European captive, who

had been hurried away from his place of confinement so abruptly two days before the Rajah's flight. In the chamber, however, was found a native servant of the prince, more cautious or more loyal than the rest, who was in the very act of hurriedly effacing some written words traced apparently in charcoal, in bold, black letters on the milky whiteness of the chunam wall. The writing, as the young officer perceived at a glance, was couched in English.

"Put that fellow under arrest, sergeant!" exclaimed Lord Alfred, excitedly, pointing to the dark-skinned native whose eyes dilated with alarm as he found himself detected. "Set a file of men to watch him, and march him to the other end of the passage. You can shut the door until I call to you, for I must copy this carefully in case of accident."

Left alone, Lord Alfred took out his note-book, and most carefully copied the mutilated inscription on the wall, letter for letter and line for line. He performed this task with an interest that surprised himself, and then calling to the sergeant, ordered him to leave a sentry at the door of the room, with instructions to prevent any native, on whatever pretext, from entering it.

"The writing there," he explained, "must be kept uninjured, since the brigadier, and perhaps the Resident, may wish to see it for themselves later on; so keep these black beggars back at the sword's point, do you hear? And, sergeant send that fellow"—pointing to the native servant who stood scowling by—"to the Provost Marshal, under escort, to be looked after for the present. You can say he has been caught in the act of suppressing evidence."

These orders were promptly obeyed, and the young officer proceeded on his rounds through the vast building, more like a small town than an ordinary dwelling, and which had an accommodation, as often is the case in India, for thousands of inmates. The search so far had not rewarded the activity displayed to any great extent. No large store of ammunition had been found, and no treasure or compromising papers. Probably Amarat Rao had burned or removed such documents; whilst the treasury itself, with its low roof, and pillars ostentatiously plated with silver, was found quite bare of coin or ingots. There was no more just then to be done, so the word was given to form and march.

A strong guard, native and European, remained behind to occupy the palace, while the long column formed again with some difficulty, owing to the nature of the forest-encumbered ground and took the route back to the cantonments.

There was some disappointment, it must be owned, among the men, that the events of the day had turned out so peacefully. For the European soldier, in the climate of India, and with the monotony of Indian camp life, does feel creeping over him a weariness of life that makes war welcome as a pleasant source of excitement. The British regiments, therefore, felt in a measure defrauded of a promised treat, in that there had been no rebellion, no resistance, no fight, to break the sameness of drill and guard mounting. But, on second thoughts, they came to vote the affair a practical joke, and to laugh contemptuously at the well-remembered terror of the armed warriors who had been left to garrison the mansion of their runaway ruler.

And when Lord Alfred Mortimer regained his quarters, his first care was to enclose the copy of the inscription which he had taken, in a letter addressed to his uncle in England, no other than our old acquaintance, the Marquess of Cheviot at Hurst Royal.

CHAPTER XLI.

CROSS PURPOSES.

LADY EGERIA FITZURSE was sitting alone, as was now often the case, at a window of her pretty blue room, listlessly gazing out at the familiar prospect, with a sad look in those beautiful eyes of hers. Quite suddenly the door opened, and the marquess, with every sign of perturbation, came fussing in, an open letter in his hand.

“It is a provoking, a most provoking thing!” said the old nobleman, less to his daughter than to himself, and then added, “I’ve just received this from your cousin Alfred in India; and a more preposterous idea than he has got into his head I never yet heard of. I have come to hate the very name of that country ever since that

miserable affair of Sir Richard's ; and now Alfred Mortimer fancies he has made a wonderful discovery that is to throw light on the fate of this same Walter Travis whom our neighbor is accused of having murdered and then buried in his own family vault—a funeral I myself attended, which I am sure I should never have done that of a ne'er-do-well adventurer like Travis—”

Perhaps the marquess here became conscious that he was limp in his logic and confused in his speech, for he coughed awkwardly, and became silent.

“But you have not yet told me, papa,” inquired Lady Egeria, with a languid interest, “what Alfred has discovered.”

“You had better hear what he says, and judge for yourself,” returned the marquess, and forthwith proceeded to read aloud :—

“‘MY DEAR UNCLE,—I did not expect to write so soon again after my letter of Monday week, thanking you for that kind one of your own, and the cheque enclosed ; but events have happened in this dullest of dull places, in which I have had the misfortune to be quartered since my arrival in India, which give me something to narrate that may be interesting to you at home. We have had a political storm or revolution here—on a small scale, of course—a mere tempest in a teacup, but which has ended in the deposition of the reigning Rajah, and the storming of his palace, which was held out most contumaciously against the powers that punish, and had to be captured by a grand display of British valor. Not that anything heroic or spirit-stirring did occur, either on the part of the defenders or our own. On the contrary, it was a victory as bloodless as if the contest had been between two sets of theatrical supers ; but there we were, horse, foot, artillery, and engineers, quite prepared for a sharp struggle, and I believe some of the soldiers felt themselves personally aggrieved that not a shot was fired into the thick of us as we broke in..... The palace was captured without the ghost of a resistance, and it was not immediately that we discovered that Amarat Rao, the prince, had, like a sly fox, given us the slip, and run away to some refuge, where, I suppose, he will at last be unearthed. He is accused openly of misgovernment, and privately, I believe, of plotting to get us hustled out of India, and to bring back the old halcyon period of war, robbery, and confiscation, wherein his ancestors thrived mightily. My story, however, does not concern the fugitive Rajah, but some unknown English captive whom he secretly kept in durance vile, I need not say without legal warrant. When going over the deserted palace on duty, quite accidentally I chanced upon a room, large and richly decorated, in which one of the dark-skinned rascals in the Rajah's service was busy in rubbing out some charcoal writing on a white wall. Ten minutes later, and I have no doubt every trace of the

prisoner would have been obliterated ; but, as it was, I saved the record from destruction, and I send you an exact copy of it, which I transferred to my note-book, and will copy for the second time in this letter. I imagine the writer of the inscription to be Walter Travis himself, and if so, to prove it would be to render a service to your friend Sir Richard Harrington, against whom ugly accusations of murder or manslaughter are current. What, however, has become of the poor fellow is another affair. Here are the words which I found yet legible on the wall—

“ “ “ Should these words of mine ever meet any English eyes..... a forlorn hope, but still.....I entreat that my countrymen will not.....untried.....Long months that seem years, so maddening.....shut up here at the pleasure of a tyrant, whom.....offended.....without prospect of escape or of release.....my constant prayer.....captivity unless rescued.....help..... friends in England, who.....I think they are about to remove me to another place of confinement.....some obscure prison where.....”

“ “ Here the remaining portion of the half-effaced inscription ceased. There was no finish, no signature, and, as I said, if I had appeared a little later on the scene, the prince's black servant would have had time to blot out what survived of the appeal of this poor wretch, which seemed doubly pathetic to me because of the uncertainty that hangs over his fate. Of course, it is possible that Amarat Rao, in taking flight, may have carried off his captive along with him. It is equally possible that an inconvenient witness may have been suppressed in a more tragic way. The attendants of an Indian Rajah are not over scrupulous, and dark deeds are easily hidden, in this country, from the light of day. What puzzles me, however, supposing the prisoner to have been Travis, is to account for the comparatively luxurious quarters in which he was shut up, and the deference and respect with which he was evidently treated. It was the Man with the Iron Mask over again, and everything seemed to indicate that the occupant of that gorgeously-decorated chamber must have been a person of rank and consequence. And yet, if not Travis, I cannot possibly conjecture who the prisoner could be—’

“ Heyday, Egeria, what is this? ”

The marquess might well ask, for now his daughter, usually so calm, cold, and impassive, was like some beautiful statue suddenly thawed into life and passionate emotion.

She started to her feet ; her hands, clasped together, were flung above her head ; and with a deep, convulsive sob she almost screamed the words—

“ Oh, father, father ! suppose it should be Sir Lionel? ”

“ Sir Lionel ! ” exclaimed the marquess, irate at this interruption. “ Stuff—nonsense ! How can it be Sir

Lionel? Why, did I not myself attend his funeral, and a very handsome funeral it was ; and now they talk this rubbish about one Walter Travis, as if it were possible he should have been buried in the family vault of the Harringtons. And here is that silly fop, Lord Alfred, writing that Walter Travis has been scrawling some nonsense on the walls of an Indian Rajah's palace, and here are you now telling me that it is Sir Lionel who has written these words"—slapping the open letter with his hand—"when Sir Lionel is dead and buried in the family vault at Grey-stone. I really am tired of all this."

And as he spoke he turned towards the door to leave the room.

Lady Egeria, who had sunk back among the silken cushions of her seat during this tirade, to which she offered no word of reply, cried out, with a sob—

"Father, leave me Alfred's letter ; I should like to read it again."

The marquess tossed the letter angrily upon the table, and was once more proceeding to leave the room, when he was again arrested by hearing his daughter ejaculate in an undertone, as if speaking to herself—

"If Harold would but seek him out for my sake ; if Harold would but go there——"

The marquess bounded like a horse touched by the spur.

"Go there? Go to India, I suppose you mean!" cried he, furious for once in his genial, good-humored existence. "This is too bad of you, Egeria, to want to take my son from me just as I have got him back ; just as he has come to his senses, and is beginning to take to English life and his duties. If once you start him off on a wild-goose chase like this, I shall never see my boy again—never, at any rate for years to come. It is too hard that he should be encouraged to resume his roaming life exactly when I hoped that he would stay with us always, and give up the blackamoors and barbarians among whom he has sown his wild oats by this time, surely. What are these Harringtons to me, or to you, that you should want Norham to go out again to that infernal country, which I sincerely wish, for one, had never been heard of? I say it is too bad!"

He paused for no reply, but bounced out of the room as he concluded, shutting the door with a slam, and growling

out irritable remarks beneath his breath as he went fuming down the stairs, in a worse temper than any living soul had ever noted in the kindly master of Hurst Royal.

Left alone, Lady Egeria took up the letter, and tried to read it for herself; but those beautiful blue eyes of hers were swimming in tears, and the writing before her was to her vision blurred and indistinct.

Then she rose to her feet, and, carrying the open letter in her hand, passed in her turn down the grand staircase, and repaired to the billiard-room, where, as she expected, she found her brother, with half-shut eyes, smoking meditatively, as he lounged among the cushions of the divan.

"Something wrong, Egeria?" asked Lord Norham, kindly, as he threw down his cigar.

"Read this—read it, Harold!" she gasped out, giving him the letter as she spoke.

He looked at her with some surprise, and still more so when at last her composure deserted her, and she broke out into wild and passionate weeping, she so cold and proud before the world at large, so that her good-natured brother was affected by the sight of her distress.

"Egeria, my sister, there—sit down by me, and let us see what can be done; but, for heaven's sake, do not give way to grief like this. Give me time, at any rate, to read this letter, since it seems to explain things."

It cost Egeria Fitzurse a cruel struggle to keep down the outburst of sorrow that had been evoked by the recent tidings. She waited patiently, sobbing low, while her brother read and re-read the letter, and then she turned her tear-stained face towards him. Lord Norham looked at her with the kind, grave smile that was peculiar to him, and refolded the letter.

"What, Harold, do you think of—this?" she asked, trembling, and with a beseeching accent in her voice.

"Well, Egeria, I think as you do," was the good-natured reply. "I think that the poor fellow is alive. That, at any rate, seems to me the most probable solution of the enigma. Mark me, I give no assurance. I only say what I think. But, if you like, I will go over there at once, and find him, if mortal man can do it."

"Over there" meant to India, and Lord Norham spoke of such a journey as coolly as another would have proposed a jaunt to London by a quick train.

Lady Egeria flushed rosy red, and her eyes glittered with gladness.

"And would you really do so much, Harold, for my sake?" she said, gratefully. "You are the dearest fellow in the world—the best of brothers. But papa will be so angry," she added, in a rueful tone.

Lord Norham laughed.

"Leave it to me," he said, with his usual composure, "to reconcile my father to the idea of my leaving him so soon. It shall not be for long. This trip will be nothing, absolutely nothing, to some of the weary marches in Central Africa, where the pilgrim's thoughts travel in an inverse ratio of speed from that at which pack oxen and negro porters can be persuaded to move. I shall hope, soon, to be back at Hurst Royal—and, perhaps, not alone!"—he added, meaningly, and again Lady Egeria changed color as she laid her hand caressingly on her brother's strong shoulder.

Nothing was said on either side, and yet Lady Egeria was perfectly aware that her brother knew the cause of her emotion, and that it was because of such knowledge on his part that he was willing to undertake the toilsome expedition of which he spoke so lightly.

Lord Norham was as good as his word. On the ensuing day he left Hurst Royal for India, and before he went he had managed, more for the sake of his sister's domestic peace than for any personal reason, to half reconcile his vexed father to this sudden overturning of all his peaceful plans for home-staying happiness.

CHAPTER XLII.

THOSE LEFT BEHIND.

LORD NORHAM was on his way to India, bent on cutting or unravelling the Gordian knot that had proved so sore a puzzle to all; but in the meantime the little world of which Wortham was the centre went on with its own joys and hopes and griefs and cares as before.

The recent storm of misfortune which had burst upon the ill-starred head of the young master of Greystone

Abbey had disturbed more households than one, but most of all that of the temporary chatelaine of Saxham Towers. The Begum, since the news of the appointment of the Government Commission of Inquiry, and of Sir Richard's incarceration, had known neither peace nor rest.

The beautiful Zenobia's disposition was of a strangely mingled weft. Such strength of feelings, such fiery earnestness of passion, whether for good or ill, are rarely to be met with united to caprice and wilfulness like hers. It was for Sir Richard Harrington's sake that she was in Europe. For him, and for him alone, had this brilliant tropical bird wandered to our colder regions, and tried to become acclimatized there. She had come, prepared to win him at any cost, by threats of exposure or by blandishments of honeyed sweetness, and she had found herself baffled by the diplomacy or the reserve of her former suitor. No suspicion that he whom she chose to consider as her affianced one was really in love with Lady Egeria Fitzurse had ever entered the mind of the Begum.

Had it been so, Othello's jealousy would hardly have been as fierce as hers; but, as it was, the proud and passionate heart of Zenobia Stone had been spared such a pang. She had many acquaintances but not one intimate friend, and thus there was the less chance that such a rumor should have reached her ears.

And then there was that too handsome Harry Redmayne. In the very nick of time, just as her patience had been about to evaporate when confronted with the baronet's weak excuses and pleas for delay, had occurred the episode of the guardsman's evident devotion to herself. Zenobia had been first flattered and then touched by this sudden homage on the part of one who had passed scathless through the ordeal of repeated London seasons, and who was now at her feet, as the veriest boy might have been.

In some respects the youthful heir of Old Court outshone Sir Richard. He was handsome, brighter, and more of an ideal bridegroom than the moody lord of the old Abbey, with all his wealth of mines and acres.

Old Court was a poor little property as compared with Greystone, but the Indian widow knew that the ready cash at her command would clear off the mortgages and double the value of the estate, while the Redmaynes were nearly

as distinguished a race, genealogically speaking, as the Harringtons themselves. She had almost made up her mind to give a favorable answer to the guardsman's proposal, when the tidings came that the Greystone mausoleum had been opened, and Sir Richard removed to Wortham gaol.

Strangely enough, when the lady of Saxham Towers heard of the evil that had come upon her former admirer, the old love surged up again in her wayward heart, and with it a pity such as she had never felt before, in the course of her life of self-indulgence, for any created thing. She had not been sparing of her menaces, when fear seemed to her the surest spell to conjure by. She had even meant, should her faithless lover prove too stubborn, to revenge herself by bringing about his ruin and blighting his name. And now, without her aid, the ruin had come; the name was blighted, and the once envied inheritor of the great Harrington estates was in prison awaiting his trial. And Zenobia, who once looked forward exultingly to such a catastrophe, was filled with womanly compassion, and thought more tenderly of the disgraced man than ever she had done when he could lift up his head among the loftiest.

The oddest feature of the case was that she did not for a moment suppose him to be innocent. Lady Egeria, who did not love him, had not condemned him. But whoever else might doubt that there was blood upon his hand, Zenobia did not. Nor was she shocked at the notion that he should be guilty—her sense of right and wrong was not sensitive enough for that. But she gave him her pity and her sympathy, and forgot, as women sometimes will, that the calamity which had come upon him was due to his own conduct. And she would have visited him in prison, compromising to herself as such a step would have been, but Sir Richard had managed gracefully to decline an attention so embarrassing to himself. She wrote to him, however; she championed his good name everywhere; she affected a certainty that he was innocent, however formidable might be the weight of evidence against him.

Two other persons, much mixed up with the late events, found themselves the objects of considerable notice on the part of those to whom their names were known. These were Jasper Holt and Miss Malstock.

Respecting Mavina, opinions were divided.

Honest Dr. Malstock had never quite got over the shock that his daughter's dissimulation had occasioned. Himself the frankest of mankind, anything like perfidy disgusted him, and with every allowance for her motives, he could not entirely forgive Mavina for the deception she had practiced on his confiding nature.

Mrs. Malstock was a vehement partisan on the other side. All her sympathies were with her child. To her maternal judgment, Mavina was a heroine who had acted a noble part. Nor was the doctor's wife by any means the only one to take this rose-colored view of her daughter's behavior. The very ruthlessness with which she had helped to hunt Sir Richard down was held to be meritorious by sundry respectable persons who would never have dreamed of such proceedings on their own part, while the young men of Wortham eyed her with increased respect, and more than one set of verses found its way into the poets' corner of a local newspaper.

With acquaintances of a higher degree, Mavina found that what she had done was differently appreciated according to personal character. Thus from Old Court no more invitations reached her, nor did the Marquess of Cheviot sanction the presence at any gathering at Hurst Royal of a young lady whom he had learned to dislike most cordially. But Lady Egeria had not withdrawn her friendship from her *protégée* who had been bequeathed to her by the late marchioness, and had permitted her cream-colored ponies to be seen stopping at the doctor's door even after the scene in Greystone church. And Lord and Lady Sparkleton, when at their country house for one of those improvised intervals of ruralizing which people of fashion now capriciously affect during the progress of their season in London, invited Mavina both to a *matinée* and to the grandest of grand dinners, and made much of her.

"And I have a good mind to ask her to stay with us in town," said Lady Sparkleton to somebody who afterwards repeated her words. "I always like to have people about me who have done something queer. In London I never give anything large without making it a point to secure Captain Boxer, the traveler who wrote that horrible book of adventures that had such a run, you know. The great charm of the man was, of course, that he boasted of having

lived as a cannibal among cannibals. And Miss Malstock, though in a less degree, would be run after in London, I dare say."

And Jasper Holt's name was buzzed from lip to lip, not always with respect or approbation, though regarding the Mill Lane lawyer there was also a controversy between lenient and hostile critics. There were those who held that his betrayal of his client, Sir Richard, was the crowning roguery of his knavish life, but there were others who found a good deal to say in extenuation of this breach of his professional duty.

The bold little attorney carried it off with a high hand, and looked all comers fearlessly in the face. He was fluent of speech, and talked many listeners into believing that he had thrown over his employer because morality and conscience dictated the sacrifice, and that he deserved to be reckoned rather as a public benefactor than a mere traitor. With respect to the charge of having taken Sir Richard's money to spend in doing his utmost to effect his ruin, Jasper made ostentatious offers of accounting for every sixpence, to which neither Messrs. Tatham & Gudge nor their luckless principal had leisure or inclination to attend. He was more reticent, however, as to a cheque for a comfortable amount, drawn by Lord Cheviot, at his daughter's request, without any questions on the part of the liberal marquess, and which had eventually passed through Marvin's hands to those of Jasper Holt.

Although Lady Egeria so faithfully performed her promise to her humble friend of bearing the cost of the inquiry into the fate of the missing Walter Travis, she was far from siding with the persecutors of the master of Greystone Abbey. On the contrary, she did not credit the accusation against him. Zenobia Stone had jumped, so to speak, at the belief in his guilt. The daughter of the house of Fitzurse, sorely perplexed as to what judgment to form, judged him more mildly, and was disposed to consider him rather as a victim of circumstances than as a criminal. There had been, so she deemed, a duel in India, on which had been founded an unjust charge of foul murder against the present baronet.

With regard to the baronet himself, the balance of public opinion was decidedly adverse. When the opening of the Harrington mausoleum was a thing of yesterday, there had

arisen a popular outcry against the assassin who had cynically ventured to conceal the corpse of his victim in his own family vault ; but presently an element of doubt was introduced into the case that set men, and women too, thinking for themselves. Tatham & Gudge had done their best for their hereditary client at this pinch. They were not themselves shining lights of law, but their London agents were Messrs. Pounce & Pontifex, of Lincoln's Inn, of whom it is possible that some of my readers may have heard before, and who had long been the legal advisers of some of the greatest families in England.

Mr. Pontifex, who was the real, if not the titular, head of the firm, had paid more than one flying visit to Wortham, and had retained, on Sir Richard's behalf, the most eminent counsel attainable. They had made representations to the authorities, too, which had had the effect of postponing the trial of the accused until there should be time for a fresh and impartial investigation of the events in India.

As to those events in India, there was a wide divergence of ideas. It was held conclusive by all, perhaps, except that dear august old nobleman at Hurst Royal, that the body found in the Greystone vault was really that of Walter Travis, as the verdict of the coroner's jury affirmed it to be. The recognition of the remains had been too general and too positive to leave that a matter of debate. Minds like that of the marquess, which resist, and refuse to take in, a notion that is repugnant, are, fortunately, rare.

Even Tatham & Gudge did not attempt to controvert the fact that Walter Travis, and not Sir Lionel Harrington, had been buried at Greystone as Sir Richard's unfortunate brother. But they had set afloat a theory, accepted by not a few, and tending to exonerate the baronet. This was that, in the confusion occasioned by the skirmish in which young Sir Lionel had fallen, and by the pestilence that was mowing down its scores daily, one body had been substituted for another through the negligence or error of the native underlings employed, and thus Sir Richard had himself been ignorant and innocent of all deception.

When it came to that awkward question of the gunshot wound, the partisans of the owner of Greystone appealed, somewhat illogically, to the popular sentiment, which has never learned to regard duelling as murder, and, at the

same time, reminded all who would hearken to them that Sir Richard had consistently and energetically denied that he had ever been acquainted, for good or ill, with Walter Travis. And so wagged the Wortham world.

CHAPTER XLIII.

NEMESIS.

“THAT fierce light which beats upon a throne ” does not, in this restless, prying nineteenth century of ours, shed its tell-tale glare exclusively upon royalty, or even on those personages who rank next to royalty. No one is safe who is not locked in the armor of proof that a clear conscience and a blameless past supply.

And this was a lesson that Zenobia Stone, no less than her quondam admirer, Sir Richard Harrington, was soon to learn by the teachings of the bitter school of adversity.

Between Wortham and Swaffham Regis was a house, pleasantly situated in well-wooded grounds, and which bore the name of Swaffham Rookery, on account of the colony of cawing rooks that dwelt among its pine trees.

This house had recently been taken by a retired colonel, who had amassed rupees enough during the forty-five years of his Indian service to live at ease in England. He was a veteran officer of the old H.E.I.C.S. ; no other than Colonel Chutney, C.B., known and respected from Trichinopoly to Peshawur.

The colonel was an excellent man, but a great gossip, and one who knew “all about ” every notoriety in Anglo-Indian society. It so happened that he knew all about the Begum, and he was not chary in expressing his astonishment at finding a woman of her more than hazy antecedents received on equal terms by the jealous magnates of his wife’s native county. He told what were those antecedents, without fear or favor, to all who chose to listen. He related the origin of the late Mr. Stone’s fortune, the loans at cent. per cent. to struggling subalterns, the opium smuggling off the coast of China, the slave dhows carrying their reeking cargoes of closely-packed black humanity from Africa to Persia and Arabia,

and other shady speculations that had made the old rogue rich. He had the personal history of Mr. Stone's wealthy widow at his fingers' ends, recollected the French renegade, her father, and the Mussulman dancing girl, her mother ; and was able to describe pretty accurately her chequered life, her queer relatives on the maternal side, her rumored adventures, and the flavor of Oriental Bohemianism, so to speak, that clung to her name.

Mrs. Chutney, too, had something to say. She knew how Mrs. Stone had been received once, and once only, by the Viceroy and his wife at Calcutta ; how the story of her career had followed her there, and caused her exclusion from a society which had, at first, taken her on trust ; and how similar social ostracisms had befallen her at Bombay, Agra, and Delhi, where the most good-natured of governors and generals had been obliged to strike her name off their list.

"It is a pity, too !" the colonel's wife had said, in summing up ; "for she has some good qualities, I believe, and is generous to a fault ; but, poor thing ! her early life and education left her scarcely a chance of being respectable, and one must be careful as to the acquaintances one forms."

So felt the little-great world that had its centre in Wortham, and accordingly the Begum of Saxham Towers felt herself suddenly surrounded, morally, by a frigid atmosphere, such as that which is experienced by those on board some threatened vessel at sea when icebergs are approaching, and the fatal drift of the coming masses of floating crystal closes in.

Mrs. Stone had been, from the first, tolerated, rather than approved of, by her neighbors ; and as soon as distinct charges were brought against her, she was tried and condemned. No longer did invitations pour in upon her, while those whom she asked to the Towers sent refusals, couched in the freezing terms which are only employed towards those whom we care not to conciliate. On neutral ground—as at some cricket match, or flower show, or volunteer review—the ladies of the county shrank from Zenobia like small birds from a soaring hawk ; while there came to be an indefinable lack of respect in the admiration still paid to her by the male sex.

Of course, there were people sufficiently obtuse or ill-natured to drop hints to Zenobia herself of the reason for

this change, and to inform her, more or less explicitly, of the nature of the allegations against her. She could not gainsay them. If here and there what was whispered reposed on a basis of fiction, there was still so much of truth that she had not the power to refute as calumnies the stories against her. Harry Redmayne, in spite of all that his family could urge, was true to his allegiance ; but even that could not atone for the coldness of some, the actual hostility of others. The Begum was ill fitted to contend with adversity. Bitterly as she resented the bad opinion of the world around her, she did not feel within herself the resources that would have enabled her to cope with it. All became as Dead Sea apples to her taste, and she wished herself dead a hundred times a day, so rapidly did troubles and mortifications close around her.

Meanwhile, Sir Richard Harrington was languishing in prison. His incarceration, so far, was not of a severe sort. Some regard had been paid to his rank and station, on account of which he was not compelled to herd with vulgar criminals awaiting trial. He was lodged in the governor's house, and was exempt from some of the stringent rules of gaol discipline. But his existence was dreary indeed, shut up as he was in an upper chamber, sparsely furnished, and the window of which commanded no prospect more cheerful than a paved courtyard, surrounded by high walls, into which, at stated periods, the inmates of the neighboring prison were marched for exercise, under the surveillance of lynx-eyed warders. The baronet came to know by sight most of these gaol birds, who seemed to be but of two types. One of these was the boy thief, slinking or saucy, according to temperament ; the other the low-browed, scowling, heavy-jowled tramp, sullenly expiating his misdeeds.

Sir Richard almost grew envious of these latter, on account of the tough endurance which they displayed, and of the stolid philosophy of the uneducated man, who hated to think, and could always sleep when permitted. With them, it was only a question of hard labor and stinted rations and enforced abstinence from liquor and tobacco, but there were no moral tortures to aggravate their condition.

The young lord of Greystone suffered in a day more than these felonious stoics underwent during the term of their sentence.

The dull monotony of his colorless life left time for memory and self-reproach to rend him as the eagle tore the flesh of chained Prometheus. He came to dread the night, because of ghastly dreams ; and yet his waking hours were full of anxious cares and vain regrets. He was uncondemned as yet, but he knew that before the bar of public opinion he had been already arraigned and found guilty. The one ennobling sentiment of his life had been his love for Lady Egeria Fitzurse. He felt now that she was as hopelessly beyond his reach as were the stars that shone down from heaven, and of which he caught a glimpse sometimes through the square window of his dismal room. There was not a friend on whose kindly judgment of him he could rely. Clever lawyers had been engaged for his defence, but they, too, thought ill of a client who seemed to have no heart even in his own cause, and who was strangely reticent as to his past life and the nature of events that had led to the accusation against him.

“My sin has found me out !” such were the bitter words of the baronet’s not infrequent soliloquy. “Yes, so it is. I cannot, as the saying is, come into court with clean hands. There is a stain on mine that can never be washed away. True, those who perished that I might prosper were of small account—a parcel of dusky heathens ; but yet their blood cries out against me from the thirsty ground, and not theirs alone. That man of whom, by some irony of fate, they call me the murderer, seems to haunt me. And yet I never harmed him. And yet I am innocent of what they charge against me, strong as are the proofs that weigh me down. It is a mockery that I—I who have done so much, and have trodden such crooked paths, that I, forsooth, might be the master of Greystone and its lands—should be placed in the dock on account of the death of yonder roving adventurer ! I never knew the man—much less slew him ! But my brother—yes, now, indeed, my hidden sin has found me out, and I am desolate beyond all men. Would that I might die and be forgotten !”

Sir Richard had aged very much since the storm of misfortune had burst upon him. There were threads of silver now streaking his crisp brown hair, and there were lines on his brow. His haggard eyes of late had assumed the restless look that we note in those of some hunted creature, and he was wan and pale. Orestes himself, the matri-

cide given over to the grim pursuit of the Furies, had not a more uneasy pillow than he. A score of times during the night he started from his fitful slumbers to pace to and fro in his prison chamber, or to gaze forth from the barred window at the driving clouds and the dark pavement of the paved yard beneath.

His words were but too true. His sin had found him out, and he was to know rest and peace no more. What availed him his wealth or his standing in the county of which for centuries his forefathers had been magnates? He knew that he was a broken man : that a blight was on his name that nothing could remove. Even a technical verdict of acquittal would not clear him with the world. And of such a verdict, in spite of the forensic renown of the advocates who were to plead for him, he had but faint hopes. His sin, indeed, had found him out, and Nemesis, though with halting steps, had overtaken him at last.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LORD NORHAM JOINS IN.

IN Futtehpore, far away, there were bustle and excitement. For now the secret of Amarat Rao's refuge, long kept dark by the sullen fidelity of his retainers, had been divulged, and an expeditionary force was being got ready to bring the recalcitrant vassal of the Supreme Government to bay. It was fully ascertained that the Rajah and the few desperate followers who clung to him in his fallen state had ensconced themselves in a stronghold on the borders of his territory, and about eighteen koss, or thirty-six miles by English measurement, distant from the capital he had deserted. And there was much heartburning and disappointment on the part of those who were not selected for the expedition from the cantonments of Futtehpore, so welcome is anything which varies the humdrum character, in times of peace, of military life in India.

The general, no doubt, exercised a wise discretion as to the component parts of the force that was preparing to set out. There was a due proportion of native infantry, the wing of a European regiment, the light company of the

Highland corps in camp, the sappers, a strong contingent of artillery, including a battery of mountain guns, and, for patrolling purposes, a squadron of cavalry, to which Lord Alfred Mortimer contrived somehow to get himself attached.

The marquess' nephew took somewhat of a personal interest in the quest of the runaway Rajah, since he it was who had discovered, on the occasion of the storming of the palace, the writing on the wall which proved the illegal captivity of some European victim of Oriental tyranny. Lord Alfred, like most others who had heard the story, connected in his own mind this writing with the mysterious fate of that Walter Travis, whose death was notoriously laid at the door of Sir Richard Harrington. And the titled subaltern, well aware of the long intimacy that had existed between the families dwelling at Hurst Royal and Greystone Abbey, trusted to be instrumental in clearing the reputation of the accused baronet from its present state of obloquy.

That Amarat Rao was to be hunted down was certain. The simplest rules of prudent policy made such a course incumbent on the higher powers. The deposed Rajah was known, or suspected, to be in constant, if secret, communication with other chiefs disaffected towards British sway, and to be striving still to make himself the moving spirit of a confederation of native rulers. It would never do to allow the standard of revolt to be unfurled with impunity, even on so small a scale. An example must be made; and hence the necessity for prompt action. No one seriously believed in the probability of a wide-spread rising. But it is well to avoid whatever may unsettle the minds of Indian princes and their ministers, and it was not forgotten that the ex-Rajah's family had high hereditary claims to leadership in that part of the swarming peninsula. The sooner the rebel could be reduced to reason the better.

On the day preceding that appointed for the march, a traveler, fresh from England, reached Futtehpore. This, as may easily be conjectured, was no other than the heir apparent to the Marquisate of Cheviot. Hasty as had been Lord Norham's departure from his native country, he had found time in London to call at the Indian Office and to provide himself with credentials which would have ensured, even to a less distinguished applicant, all possible aid and countenance from the authorities in India. But

even without such letters, Lord Norham's name would, probably, have been enough. As it was, the newly-arrived traveler met with the most courteous reception at the Residency, and was well received also at headquarters by the general in command, who readily acceded to his request to be allowed to accompany the expedition.

"And indeed, my lord, I wish I were ganging myself," remarked the tough old brigadier, whose Argyleshire accent had remained unsoftened by three-and-forty chequered years of military service. "But that would be to pay too high a compliment to that unchancy chiel, Amarat Rao, after his moonlight flitting. It's just a mere meilitary promenade, but it may be worth your lordship's while to witness it, for the curiosity of the thing. There'll be no fighting, but the place is gey hard to take, unless the weather continues to be dry and hot, as it is now, and even that you can't rely upon in those elevated regions as you can down here in the plains."

Lord Norham's only answer was an inquiring look, and the general, glad of a new listener, went on to explain the meaning of his previous speech—

"Ye see, my lord, the place to which this landlouser of a Rajah has thought fit to flee is just a hill fort on the borders of his country that they call the Vulture's Rock, and really the name befits it. I mind the tower well, though when I saw it I was a griffin here, a raw subaltern, wasting my time and good gunpowder on snipe and deer. A wild spot enough, and a barren one, lying, as it does, half-way to the clouds, and among rough crags and pebbly nullahs—as desolate a nook as any in India. The stronghold itself was built by Sultan Tippoo—Tippoo Sahib, as you call him in England—in some old war, and would be almost impregnable but for the want of water. The weakness of the defence, my lord, consists simply in the fact that no well or spring exists, and that the garrison must depend on rain to keep tank and cistern full. This parching weather, if the hot wind holds, must soon bring the puir benighted heathen creatures to sue for terms."

It was settled, then, that Lord Norham was to have the privilege of accompanying the expedition, and the newly-arrived traveller at once began his preparations for the brief campaign. There was much to do in the remaining hours before nightfall, since the march was fixed for day-

break, and the heir of Hurst Royal had no one with him save his Italian valet, Antonio, who had followed the fortunes of his roving master through rougher regions and more barbarous races than those by which he was now surrounded. There were servants and coolies and tent lascars to hire, camp equipage to purchase, stores to lay in, and baggage animals to procure ; for India is a country of many wants, and these had to be provided for in the briefest possible space of time.

Lord Alfred Mortimer, who was delighted to greet the kinsman of whom he had heard so much and seen so little, lent what assistance he could, and was astonished at the promptitude with which Lord Norham's well-supplied purse and resolute will solved the problem of how to be quickly ready for the road.

"You agree with me, then, that the writing on the wall must have a good deal to do in any case with this awkward affair of Sir Richard's Harrington's?" said Lord Alfred, as he sat, with a lighted cheroot between his lips, in his own quarters, after dinner, in company with his freshly-arrived cousin.

"A good deal to do with it, no doubt," ambiguously replied Lord Norham, stroking his brown beard.

"It is perfectly clear," pursued the titled subaltern, "that if this fellow Travis is alive after all, as there is every reason to conclude, the accusation of murder falls to the ground, and the only wonder is why the Rajah should have kept him locked up so long, and what the object of his imprisonment could be, unless it were done out of pure malice, and to cast suspicion on that unlucky baronet. And rumor says that Harrington was in high favor at the palace during his stay here, which makes the affair odder still."

"Very odd," tranquilly responded Lord Norham, lighting a second cigar. He had his own ideas as to the identity of the Rajah's mysterious captive, but he preferred to keep them to himself. In his eyes, the scion of the ducal house of Mortimer was simply a good-natured, feather-pated youngster, by whose opinion he set little store. But assuredly he would not himself have come out from England for no purpose but that of being confronted by the missing Walter Travis. Of Lady Egeria's motives and his own, then, he said nothing, but let Lord Alfred rattle

on concerning English sport and English society, the London season then in progress, the Derby that had been, and the races at Ascot, Goodwood and Doncaster, that were to be ; the crack yachts that were to figure in the Cowes Regatta, the grouse shooting in Perthshire, and the steeplechase at Liverpool.

Lord Norham laughed grimly as his young relative came to a pause in his discourse.

"Upon my word," he said, "you are far better posted up in all these matters, Mortimer, than I am. To be sure, I never book a bet, and am scandalously ignorant of the current odds, and even of the names of these equine favorites for cups and stakes that you seem to know so well. Mine is a hermit's life, if a wandering one, and the Belgravian world gets on, no doubt, wonderfully well without me. I should be as out of my element at Newmarket as in Mayfair, and my little yacht, the *Moonbeam*, has never competed yet for any prize, and only suits for knocking about among the fiords and islets of Norway. But I think I'll say 'good-night' now, for even I am tired for once, and we, both of us, have to be afoot early to-morrow, since we march at dawn."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE VULTURE'S ROCK.

"THIS is the place, sahibs," said the smart young sergeant of Irregular Cavalry who acted as guide to the advanced guard, wheeling his fiery horse, and saluting with his sabre, as the crest of the pass was reached ; and yonder, where the white stones of the masonry gleam against the dark rock, and the path winds upwards like a snake amongst the green bushes, is the vulture's home of prey."

The group of mounted officers who led the way reined up their steeds at once, and field glasses were adjusted and passed from hand to hand.

"I am a civilian, and as such I suppose that my opinion does not count for much," said Lord Norham smiling ; "but otherwise I should pronounce the position a strong one, and admirably selected."

"I quite agree with you, my lord," replied a senior officer as he examined the hostile fortress through his glass; "a hard nut to crack, even in these days of improved artillery, and must have been quite impregnable in the last century, when only howitzers and smooth-bored cannon could have been used against it. And I don't see now how we are to take it, except by blockade. An assault would be sheer madness, and even if successful, would cost more lives than the place is worth."

Seen from that spot, the Vulture's Rock presented a grim and imposing aspect. At some distance from the narrow mountain road a bold peak rose steeply, and was crowned by the low tower and the other buildings of the stronghold. On the keep itself a red flag, the symbol of revolt, had been hoisted, but the day was a still one, and the silken banner hung down, like a trail of blood, against the white flagstaff. Above the battlements a few turbaned heads, and here and there the glitter of a spear point or a matchlock barrel, could be discerned, while from the square stone embrasures peeped forth at regular intervals the threatening muzzles of the brass cannon, and the low, deep sound of the beating of a large drum, evidently calling those within to arms, showed the scanty garrison to be on the alert, and left no doubt that Amarat Rao and his followers were perfectly well aware of the proximity of the force that had been despatched against them.

"Yes, noble sahib, I know the country well," said the turbaned officer of Irregulars, in reply to a question from Lord Alfred, "and no wonder, seeing that my native village is but a short distance off, on the other side of these unblest mountains. And I have heard my father and my grandsire, who were soldiers too, and of course believers like myself, talk of Sultan Tippoo's fort and its strength, and how it had beaten off the choicest troops of those infidel dogs the Mahrattas.

Some of the younger officers, with the rashness of inexperience, grumbled at the prudent policy of their elders, and would have risked all on the result of a shower of war-rockets and a rush with the bayonet. It was clear, however, to those whose heads were cooler, that the stormers in such a case would be mowed down like corn before the sickle, and, besides, the general's orders had been too explicit to permit such useless waste of life.

"Patience, my young friends, whether we like it or not, must be the order of the day," remarked the major, who had spoken before. "We have got to invest the place as if it were a second Plevna, and must wait until those inside open the doors to let us in, which, to judge by present appearances, they are not inclined to do," he added, as a defiant burst of barbaric music, drums, clarions, and cymbals, in unison, reached the ears of the gazers, while a sudden puff of wind filled the crimson folds of the banner drooping against the flagstaff, and caused the red flag to display itself as in response to the flourish of the trumpets and the beating of the drums. Then there was a flash of flame and a gush of white smoke from the ramparts, and next the rattling down of loose stones and rubbish as the shot that had been fired struck the splintered rock wall to the right of the road.

It took some time for the lengthy and straggling column, with its baggage train and the long line of hangers on, to complete the ascent of the pass, and night fell before the work of forming the encampment was fully effected. At last, however, tents were pitched and fires lighted, while strong pickets had been posted in outlying positions, so as to prevent the fugitive prince from again seeking safety in flight.

"I wonder," said Lord Norham, more to himself than to his young kinsman, as they strolled together through the outskirts of the camp, "whether the prisoner on the rock above can catch a glimpse of the fires below, and knows that they forbode that rescue is near at hand."

"Perhaps he may, poor fellow!" was Lord Alfred's answer; "and I hope, for his sake, that the day of liberation may be soon. But his position is an awkward one. It is not pleasant to feel that one's life depends on the caprice of a whimsical Oriental despot like that precious Rajah, who may order him to be strangled or stabbed when things are at their worst."

"I forgot that!" returned Lady Egeria's brother, in an altered voice, and flinging away his unfinished cigar; "yes, it is hard to lie defenceless within reach of a dying tiger."

The three next days went by without any notable event. A flag of truce, with a summons to surrender, had been sent up to the castle. But the only answer had been an insulting blare of trumpets and clamor of kettle-drums, and

when the messenger attempted to approach nearer to the gates the flag was fired upon. Meanwhile, the besiegers had difficulties to contend with. The spot chosen for their encampment was out of reach of the heavy cannon of the fort, but the locality proved even drier than had been expected, and hundreds of coolies, laden with water skins, had to struggle incessantly up the steep and stony track, to keep up the supply necessary for men and animals in the camp. The sappers had plenty to do, since rocks had to be bored and blasted, and thorny shrubs and moraines of loose stones cleared away, before it became possible to advance even the light mountain battery of guns near enough to the defences to be in any way efficient. From time to time the roar of the brass cannon on the ramparts, and the reverberation of the sound from the sullen echoes of the caverned cliffs, told that the fortress held out, in spite of odds, to the last.

The weather was uncertain. The nights, as usual in Asia, and especially at such a height above the sea, were keen and frosty, so that some of the ill-provided camp followers suffered much from cold. The days were hot, but around some distant peaks of the mountain range gathered leaden-colored masses of cloud that seemed fraught with rain. The setting in of such rain, falling in the profusion customary in those sub-tropical regions, meant security, for a time at least, to the defenders of the fort, and equally, as a matter of course, the discomfiture of the expedition. How must those desperate men who had shared the flight of their prince, and now stood by him on the Vulture's Rock, have looked with longing eyes at the dark cloud masses on the horizon, hoping that the breaking up of the hot weather, accompanied by torrents of rain, would replenish the scanty store of water, and render their position tenable.

Nature was obdurate, however. The weather continued dry and the sun scorchingly hot, and not a drop of rain fell on the bare rocks and parched nullahs around. The dense array of dark clouds, after lingering as if to tantalize the thirsting gazers from the battlements, rolled heavily off and disappeared towards the southward. And still the long line of water carriers came toiling up the hill road, bringing supplies to the camp, while the mountain battery had at last been got into working order, and had

opened fire on the fort, but without producing any perceptible effect upon the solid masonry and rock-hewn ramparts which protected it.

“Good news, Norham!” exclaimed Lord Alfred, bursting excitedly into the tent. “The game is played out, and the trick done. Don’t you hear our fellows cheering,—there, again! The black beggars have hauled down their red flag and hoisted a white one in its place, and have flung the gates open, in token of surrender. It only remains for us to march in, so be quick!”

Very strange, at that noontide hour, with the fierce sun blazing high in the cloudless heavens, was the aspect of the Vulture’s Rock when the advance of the British force poured in through the open gates. The soldiers of the Rajah’s small garrison preserved a manly attitude as their conquerors marched in, with bugle sound and frequent cheering, and stood like so many bronze statues, with hands lifted to their turbans, gravely saluting the victorious foe. They had laid their weapons on the ground, with the hilts of their swords and the butt ends of their firelocks turned outwards, and with sullen eyes waited passively.

“Thirst, against which none can fight, has overcome us!” pithily remarks the Sirdar, with a bow, as he gave up his jewelled scimitar, in sign of submission, to the officer of rank who led the van.

“The place,” remarked an engineer officer to Lord Norham, as they pressed on, “is even stronger than I thought. Woolwich Infants and heavy charges would be needed to breach such walls, which are, as you see, my lord, actually hewn out of the living rock, and of enormous thickness.

In the principal chamber, or hall of daïs, crouching, like a haunted tiger, among the silken cushions of his gorgeous divan, and forsaken by all, Amarat Rao was found alone. He had exchanged his usual garb of spotless white for the dark blue robes which high-caste natives don in token of mourning, and only the gemmed dagger in his shawl girdle and the jewels on his high cap indicated his rank. There was a dull glow, as of impotent rage, in his dark eyes, but his attitude was one of utter dejection.

“We were obliged,” whispered the Sirdar of the Rajah’s troops to the English commander, “to mutiny, and to put

him under restraint, since he desired, in his fury, to set fire to the powder in the magazine and to send us all to Jehanum before our time. But we were faithful to our salt, until to resist further became madness. Not one of us has had a drop of water to moisten his parched throat for more than two days and nights, sahib colonel ! ”

The major of engineers accosted the Rajah with the civility due to misfortune, and bade him to have no fear as to his personal treatment.

There came a sudden flash of rage from the dark eyes of the fallen prince.

“ Take my *jika* of sovereignty ! ” he exclaimed, tearing the royal turban with its jewelled aigrette of heron feathers from his head. “ And take my life too, if you will. But for those cravens who flinched from me at the last I should at least have died a man’s death, but you are masters now.”

Then he resumed his former dogged silence, and refused to reply, by word or look, to any of the questions which were addressed to him.

A supple figure, clad in white, now glided up to the major of engineers, and salaamed profoundly as he said—

“ I am the humblest of your slaves, sahib major, but a little lamp throws light, and I can lead you to the place where a countryman of your own lies in durance, and can tell you better than he can how he came to be there.”

“ Who are you, my fine fellow ? ” demanded the major.

“ I am Motee, long the confidential servant of him who was yesterday our Rajah,” answered the man, with a bow and a smile ; “ and if you will follow me, sahibs, I will show you where the bird is caged.”

Led by Motee, a group of officers, amidst whom were Lord Norham and his kinsman, rapidly traversed the narrow passages and dimly-lighted halls of the fortress, and then descended a few steps cut in the rock, and which led to a postern. This once opened, a small courtyard was revealed, above which the bare rock rose steeply on three sides, while on the fourth was the wall of the fort. The court, with its weed-grown stones, seemed useless and neglected. Motee approached the rock to the eastward, and laid his hand upon it, touching, no doubt, some spring almost imperceptible, for immediately a door, cunningly

concealed, flew open, and disclosed a small chamber excavated in the serpentine rock on which the fortress was built, and which only received light and air from a fissure, natural or artificial, above. On the rocky floor, strewn with rice straw, was a mattress of striped silk, on which, covered by a trooper's mantle of coarse cloth, lay a human form, richly dressed in Oriental fashion.

"Is he dead or alive?" exclaimed Lord Norham, anxiously, and then, as the prostrate figure moved, and a haggard face was turned towards the doorway, through which the light streamed in: "alive, I see! and—yes, by Heaven, it is Lionel Harrington!"

"Yes, that is my name!" answered the captive feebly, as he strove to rise.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE RESCUE.

THERE was a loud outburst of voices exclaiming in pity, wonder, and indignation, as the Rajah's captive was recognized, and as he answered to the name by which Lord Norham had addressed him. Every officer at Futtehpore had heard some rumors concerning the European prisoner whom the fugitive prince had so mysteriously carried off when he sought refuge on the Vulture's Rock; but most of them had concluded this victim of Oriental tyranny to be the missing Walter Travis. A far deeper interest attached to that other Englishman, whose supposed death had long been established in popular credence, and who was now so confidently identified with the solitary occupant of the chamber hidden in the rock.

"He speaks the truth, worthy sahibs," obsequiously interjected Motee, who was evidently anxious to earn the good-will of the winning party; "and I—your poor servant—can lay open before you every detail in the black business through which you find him here."

"But he is ill; perhaps dying!" exclaimed Lord Norham and his kinsman, who were kneeling beside the now recumbent figure on the silken pallet.

"He is faint, sahibs; and no wonder!" replied Motee

in a low voice, and in an apologetic manner ; “since he has had neither food nor water for more than two days ; nay, it is nearly three. Such were the commands of Amarat Rao when the water ran short in the tank. The Rajah chose that the prisoner should be the first to suffer. I shared my last cupful with him, Feringhee as he was.”

The rescued captive was carried into the fort, and placed in a room comfortably furnished, which in time of peace formed a portion of the governor’s quarters. But it was necessary to wait until water, as well as wine and cordials, and food, too, had been brought up from the camp below, and cautiously administered under the sanction of the medical officer in attendance, before it was thought safe to allow of any conversation between the prisoner and those who had him in their care.

Of these, Lord Norham and Lord Alfred, as acquainted with his family, were the chief ; and in their hands, and in those of the doctor, he was left. The other officers had their work to do. Guards had to be set over the powder magazine, and provision made for the safe custody of Amarat Rao, while it was necessary to relieve the wants, as well as to ensure the good behavior, of the starving garrison.

“They treated me well at first,” said the Rajah’s late prisoner, when, after some refreshment and repose, the doctor considered that he was fit to talk, “and with a studied respect that was often galling, since it was coupled with a tacit refusal to enlighten me as to the cause of my imprisonment. The servants and soldiers whom I saw never mentioned their master’s name, but I was pretty sure that it was to Amarat Rao that I owed my incarceration. When they removed me to this place, the tyrant’s mood had changed, and instead of being luxuriously housed as before, I was thrust into a veritable dungeon, where, but for your arrival, I should doubtless have been left to die.”

Lord Norham felt that a difficult task was before him. From several chance expressions he perceived that the rescued captive was quite unconscious of the true motive of his persecutors, and yet the truth had to be broken to him as gently as it might.

“The last thing I remember,” said Sir Lionel Harring-

tion, "of the confused events of the skirmish, was that I was unhorsed and struggling to get my sword arm free, when some one from behind dealt me a stunning blow upon the head—perhaps with the butt end of a pistol—and then everything grew dark. When I recovered my senses, I was already shut up in the chamber that I continued to inhabit till I was removed from the palace, and on the wall of which I wrote some words in our own language, in the half futile hope that English eyes might one day behold them."

"It so chanced, when we took military possession of the palace, that I was the finder," remarked Lord Alfred, smiling; "little dreaming at the time who was the real writer of that appeal for aid."

"I only wonder," pursued Sir Lionel, "that I did not go mad in solitary confinement in that place, cut off, not only from human intercourse, but from books and newspapers, and every link with the outer world. It was a terrible time, as you may well believe. And, Lord Norham, I had an additional source of grief, in remembering what must be the distress of my poor brother Richard, who no doubt mourned me as dead."

Lord Alfred fidgeted and looked nervous, while Lord Norham shook his head.

"You have much to learn, Sir Lionel," he said, with grave kindness, "and I assure you that the duty of undeceiving you on some points is a very painful one to me, but there is no help for it. It will be news to you to hear that my own father attended, as he believed, your funeral at Greystone, when the coffin, brought from India by your brother, whom all considered as the baronet, was laid in the family vault."

The listener started, and a flush rose to his pale cheek. "How could such a mistake be possible—and to Richard, too?"

"The coffin was not empty," answered Lord Norham, "but it contained, as subsequent examination proved, the remains of a man who in age and stature bore some resemblance, Sir Lionel, to yourself, and whose name, perhaps known to you, was Walter Travis."

"Travis—Walter Travis!" murmured Sir Lionel, as if consulting his memory; "yes, I have some recollection of the name, and of the bearer of it; though I only saw

him casually once, a wandering European I think, who got into the Rajah's household."

"Your account of the man is quite correct," answered Lord Norham; "but it so happened that Walter Travis, who was poor, but by birth a gentleman, and born in the county to which we both belong, had friends at home who instituted a search for him when he ceased to write, and who attributed his death to foul play, so that—excuse me—they taxed your brother with having made away with him."

"I am sure Richard never knew—never harmed—the man!" exclaimed Sir Lionel, surprised and indignant.

"I, too, feel convinced of that," drily rejoined Lord Norham, "thought I am bound to say that the circumstantial evidence on which Sir Richard, as we call him, was accused, well warranted such a belief. There was a duel, not fairly fought, in which Travis received a wound that perhaps hastened his death when cholera laid its fatal grip upon him. But I am by no means sure that your brother was the officer by whose bullet the wound was inflicted, though he certainly, in concert with his friend and fellow plotter, Amarat Rao, availed himself of Travis' death by placing the body of the poor wretch in the coffin that was to be carried home to England as yours, and thus——"

"Hold, hold! My Lord Norham, you seem to forget that it is of my own brother—of dear Richard—that you speak!" exclaimed Sir Lionel, gasping for breath, and growing paler than before, so that the doctor muttered something about over excitement; "would you have me consider you as poor Dick's avowed enemy?"

"I am not that, nor is my cousin Norham here," blurted out Lord Alfred, unable to keep silence; "and yet it's a true bill. There cannot be a doubt, I am sorry to say, that Mr. Richard Harrington was in league with the rascally Rajah throughout, that the pair of confederates devised to attack the convoy, that what you took to be robbers were really Amarat Rao's troopers in disguise, and that you were hustled into the palace and locked up there, while the body of Walter Travis was confined and taken to Greystone, just to throw dust in people's eyes and ensure Sir Richard's succession to the title and estates. Of course, he had to pay blackmail pretty smartly to his Indian accomplice. Motee, the servant, has just

confessed to us his share in the fraud, and has told us how the Rajah drew bills upon your brother to an inconceivable extent, more than once, sure that the cash would be forthcoming rather than a scandal should ensue. Then came suspicion, as to the murder of Travis I mean, and the mausoleum and the coffin were opened, and that by special authority from Government, and Sir Richard lies in prison, awaiting his trial on account of Travis' alleged murder."

"Of which I trust in Heaven that he is innocent—nay I feel assured of it," exclaimed Sir Lionel, eagerly; "and yet," he added, with a sob, "such black treachery—oh, Dick, Dick! how must the fiend of covetous greed have whispered in your ear before you sold me into captivity such as that!"

He turned his face away, and kept silence for awhile.

Presently Sir Lionel turned towards them again. His noble face looked very handsome and sad as he held out his thin white hand, and said, "Norham, forgive me if I said anything petulant or ungrateful. It has all come upon me so suddenly—this cruel truth—that I could almost wish that I had fallen outright in that affray, though then my brother—oh, Richard!—would have had yet heavier guilt upon his soul. I suppose it was a terrible temptation, those lands and rents that go along with the old Abbey, and the empty honors of the baronetcy, and which my father's death brought so close within reach. And yet, had he but asked it, I would have shared with him as freely as—but he chose his course, poor fellow, and has cause to rue it now, though not through any resentment of mine."

"You mean——" asked Lord Norham, with a look of inquiry.

"I mean that I will forgive—nay, that I have forgiven him already," replied Sir Lionel, scarcely aware how much the noble simplicity of the speech touched and surprised his hearers. "He shall not suffer, if I can prevent it, either from poverty or the withdrawal of a brother's love; but—but!"

His voice died away here, and he seemed to be fainting, so that cordials had to be administered, though very cautiously, and all further conversation prohibited.

On the next day began the breaking up of the camp and

the slow homeward march of the force that had been told off for the expedition. A small guard of Native Infantry remained stationed on the Vulture's Rock, the late defenders of which were to be sent under escort to Futtehpore.

Already Amarat Rao was on his way to the fortress where, as a state prisoner, it was probable that he would linger out his life. He maintained to the last the same demeanor, deep dejection alternating with fits of blind fury, and absolutely refusing to answer any questions, even concerning the European prisoner whom he had brought with him from his palace, or his own complicity with Richard Harrington.

What he would not acknowledge, however, there were others who were eager to earn favor, and a little money, by disclosing. Not only was the ex-*Thag*, Motee, willing to tell all he knew, but the Rajah's Parsee secretary, who had been taken perforce into his employer's confidence, placed his testimony at Lord Norham's disposal. The former, also, volunteered on returning to Futtehpore to put into Lord Norham's hands some papers that had belonged to the lost Walter Travis, and which Motee had stowed away in some secure hiding place before sharing his master's flight. And these, it was thought, would go far towards elucidating the truth with respect to the heavy accusation that hung over Sir Richard's head. No one was so desirous to exonerate him, if possible, from the weighty charge for which he was to be tried than was the brother he had betrayed, and who declared his intention, well or ill, of setting forth at once for England.

The return to Futtehpore, thanks to the care that in his weak state was lavished on Sir Lionel by the kind friends in whose keeping he now was, was effected with not much fatigue, and then preparations were promptly made for the journey to Bombay, and thence to Europe. The rescued captive gained strength every day, and was feverishly impatient to set off.

"We shall arrive, I hope, in time to save Richard!" was a frequent utterance of Sir Lionel's. For it was not forgotten in India that he who was still called the baronet was soon to stand before a jury, charged with the murder of Walter Travis; and the papers which Motee, in compliance with his promise, had lodged in the hands of Lord

Norham, had turned out of unexpected value in throwing light upon the pseudo duel that had been fought in the jungle. At last the preparations were complete, and Lord Norham and Sir Lionel Harrington started for England.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE LAST VISIT IN PRISON.

THE day on which Sir Richard Harrington's trial—long deferred—was to take place had at last been fixed. It was deemed all but certain, in spite of the forensic talent enlisted on the prisoner's behalf, that the verdict of the jury would be against him. On the eve of the day for which the trial was appointed, the young master of Grey-stone sat alone, as usual, in that upper chamber of the governor's house, which was his temporary prison. Writing materials were on the table, which was also strewn with letters; but these were neglected by the lonely occupant of the dreary room, who sat motionless, leaning his head upon his hand, and too busy with his own thoughts to be aware of the fact that the door had been unlocked and opened, and that the warder whose duty it was to attend on him had entered, and had twice addressed him.

At last the rustling of feminine attire, and a touch of a soft hand on his wrist, made Sir Richard start and look up. He then perceived that the warder had ushered a visitor—a lady—into the room, and was retiring.

"Zenobia—Mrs. Stone!" exclaimed the baronet, as he was still believed to be, rising to his feet, as his eyes met hers.

The key turned gratingly in the rusty lock, and the two were left for awhile alone.

"Yes, I am here," answered the lady of Saxham Towers, in a tone that was half reproachful, half compassionate. "Did you not expect me, Richard? As it is I have deferred my visit until it is very late—until the last day."

"The last day, you mean," replied Sir Richard, bitterly, as with grave courtesy he placed a chair for his fair visitor, "on which I shall possess even the modicum of freedom I enjoy—the last on which I shall be held innocent in the

eyes of the law ! Yes, Zenobia, you are right. To-morrow I shall be condemned. My counsel will do their best, for their own reputation rather than for my sake, in the losing battle ; but for all that the jury will find me guilty. And even if, through some sentimental scruple, my sentence should be commuted for one of life-long imprisonment, there would in that be only a mockery of mercy. Great heavens ! how galling to one like me—a Harrington—would be the grinding discipline, the garb of shame, the enforced association with the vilest felons, the enforced submission to harsh warders, and this to drag on until death comes tardily to end it. Yes, I am brought very low, now.”

“Is it because of that,” responded the visitor, in so low a tone as to be almost inaudible, “that I am here to-day ? I have come, Richard, in this your hour of extremest need, to give you the means of escape.”

He stared at her with wonder in his dull, haggard eyes, and then shook his head, and turned away with a pceevish exclamation. Of what was the woman talking ? What could she mean ? Escape ! She knew, he thought, very little of the world, out of India, and perhaps she was about to suggest some expedient, possible there, but in England hopeless ; of bribery, to purchase the connivance of a gaoler, or, it might be, of a silken ladder and false keys to effect an exit from that guarded place. Such a scheme would be worse than futile, and therefore he had turned from the speaker with impatience. But presently Zenobia spoke again, and there was something in her voice that impressed him in spite of himself, and made him look at her more attentively than before.

“Listen, Richard !”

The Begum, as was her wont, was richly dressed ; nay, on this occasion the splendor of her apparel was unusual, even for her ; and the costly jewels that in defiance of custom and taste she chose to wear, flashed brilliantly by contrast with the bare walls and mean furniture of that dismal room. She was pale, beautiful as ever, but with a sternness, due to a set purpose, in her expression that modified the character of her beauty. It was Cleopatra still, but Cleopatra at the last, after Actium had been lost, after the battle and the flight, and when the Roman galleys were already in the waters of the Nile, and only one refuge remained for Antony and the hunted Queen.

"Listen, Richard !" she said, for the second time, as she bent towards him, lowering her voice, as if in fear of being overheard, almost to a whisper ; "what you have just said has been in my mind, sleeping and waking, for weeks past, and I can see, dear, but one way. Yes, you will be condemned. They all say so. There are some—several—who think your life will, for sundry reasons, be spared by what they call the clemency of the authorities ; but yet there will be the shame, the suffering, the long list of indignities, the hopeless, cruel bondage, worse, because more degrading, than that of slavery itself. And it is to save you—you whom I have loved so dearly—from all this that I am here to-day. I have come, Richard, to offer you the means not of gaining your liberty ; that I cannot ; but at least of baffling your enemies, and of eluding disgrace by a quick and easy death."

He looked at her. Her dark eyes met his. Evidently she was awaiting his reply.

"Poison ?" he whispered hoarsely.

Zenobia inclined her head in token of assent.

"Sure, prompt, and painless in its effects," she answered in the same cautious manner as before. "We, in India, as you know, have potions at our command that your pharmacopœia does not name, even for the purpose of providing an antidote. I have with me here what will enable you to defy the worst that your persecutors have in store for you. When the game is played and lost, as it is with you and me, Richard, the best that can be done is to leave the scene gracefully."

"I could not do it," he said, shuddering, and then reddened as he saw Zenobia's eyes harden scornfully.

"Do not mistake me !" he said, earnestly ; "I have not flinched many a day when face to face with danger. If it were a pistol barrel, now—but the thought of poison is repugnant to me, even as the touch of a snake."

"Men have teased a half-tamed cobra into using its fangs, before now, when a dishonorable ending lay before them," coldly replied the Begum. "Do you believe, Richard, that I—I, Zenobia Stone—would recommend to another what I dared not choose for myself ? No, I, too, am heart-sick and weary of the sunlight, and would be at rest. Ask me no questions. Time is short, and the duration of this last sad visit that I pay you is limited, so that

I have not time to dwell on my own prospects—blank and dark as they are. Yes, Richard Harrington, you are the only man I ever really loved—the only one—and it is for that reason that I could not bear to see you doomed to disgrace, whether by the hangman's hands or in that death-in-life which penal servitude implies to a man of lineage and education such as yours.

"Perhaps you are right," muttered the baronet, irresolutely; "and yet I shrink from what you offer me, Zenobia, as though I were the veriest coward—perhaps it is my conscience that unmans me—and yet I am no murderer, well as I deserve the ill that has befallen me."

A sad smile flitted across those firm, red lips of Zenobia's. She did not believe in her former lover's protestations of innocence as to the death of Walter Travis, but, guilty or innocent, she was certain that there was only one means of escape from shameful punishment.

"Take a woman's advice—obey a woman's warning!" she said, with the impressive accents that would have become some heathen prophetess of the long past, "and profit by the brief space of comparative liberty to avoid the ignominy that awaits you. I shall not be long before—but no matter! Ah, Richard, my lover of other days, why did you not make a friend of me from the first? Why leave India? Why desert Zenobia? Why come to this cold, hard country, full of prying eyes and censorious tongues, to be dogged to death by such as those who have massed proofs together for your undoing; had you but stayed at Futtehpore, had you but told all to me—your truest friend—we might have been happy together and had bright years in store for us; whereas now," she said, with a softened voice and somewhat of a sob—"but I hear the warder's heavy tread in the passage without, and I can stay no longer, but must say farewell!"

She rose, not hastily, but with the stately grace of her habitual movements, and flung her arms around Sir Richard's neck, and kissed him twice on his pale forehead and once on his cheek. Then she released him from her embrace just as again the stiff key turned gratingly in the rusty lock.

"Here—hide it—keep it from all eyes," she whispered, as she drew from beneath the lace handkerchief that she carried a tiny bottle or phial of a purple color, and thrust

it into his half-willing hand. Then she resumed her seat just as the door opened, and the warder's bullet head and broad figure became visible.

"I am ready!" said the Begum, as she rose, and slipped a sovereign into the man's ready palm. "My carriage waits? Yes, that is well. Good-bye, then, Sir Richard, and remember that I, and all your friends, will be anxious on your account to-morrow. And remember my last words."

She gave him her hand, and he pressed it, and she gave him one long, speaking look, one wan smile, and was gone.

Left alone, Sir Richard's first care was to conceal among his books and papers the purple phial that had been Zenobia's last gift, and then flung himself back into his chair, and again pillowed his head upon his hands in the same attitude of hopeless despondency as before.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE DAY OF THE TRIAL.

WORTHAM was crowded by those whom curiosity had attracted towards its old Court House, for now the day of Sir Richard Harrington's trial had arrived, and the popular excitement was at its height. Special correspondents of all possible newspapers were disputing quarters with one another, and sightseers pure and simple poured into the place by every train. Judges, jury, and sheriff were ready, of course, to discharge their official duties, and some grand speeches were expected, chiefly from the eminent counsel engaged for the defense. And yet no one anticipated an acquittal. The forensic fireworks, all foresaw, would be thrown away in the attempt to bolster up a hopeless cause and save an unworthy client. Many of the visitors went to stare at the uncompromising edifice of grimy brick, with its grim outer wall and barred windows, that bore the name of Wortham Gaol, and within which, as all knew, was shut up the prisoner whose trial was the occasion of their holiday trip.

At ten o'clock the trial was to commence in the ancient

Court House, at the bar of which, in older days, many a moss-trooper of Border fame, and many a sheepstealer or other marauder of a more prosaic sort, had stood to hear his doom of death upon the gallows.

At half-past eight, according to custom, the prisoner's breakfast had been taken into his room by the attendant who waited on him.

An hour later, the tramp of heavy feet was heard ascending the stairs and traversing the passage, for now the time had come for Sir Richard, in custody, to be removed to the Court House and placed in the dock. A sergeant and two constables of the police, as well as the superintendent, had arrived to act as escort, while the governor of the prison, with two warders, also proposed to accompany the important ward for whose safe-keeping they were responsible to the law.

Tramp ! tramp ! the sounds drew nearer, and presently—for the baronet was still, in his unconvicted state, treated with regard to his social station—there was a knocking at his door.

No answer ! The knocks were repeated, but still there was no reply !

Colonel Wood, the governor, looked uncomfortable, and glanced towards the superintendent of police, who stole a sidelong look at him and coughed awkwardly behind his white-gloved hand. Then the senior warder unlocked the door and opened it. There, on the table, stood Sir Richard's untasted breakfast, while on the bed, which was at the opposite side of the chamber, lay a prostrate form, with averted face, seemingly asleep.

Again the governor and the superintendent exchanged glances.

"Don't like the look of things, colonel," said the latter, in a whisper.

"Nor I. He never, to my recollection, persisted in such silence as this," returned the governor, nervously.

The chief warder went forward.

"Sir Richard," he said, loudly, and, no reply being made, laid his hands upon the recumbent figure and turned it partially round, so that the face could be seen.

Horror ! It was a dead man's face that met their view—the eyes half closed, the features set and motionless, a grey pallor spread over the lineaments, such as is Death's own seal, set upon those whom he garners in.

There was a hush, and then an outcry of voices.

"I thought as much, sir!" said the chief of the police shaking his head.

"I feared so, too; and yet how could it be helped? After all our precautions, how could it have happened?" exclaimed the governor, looking miserable, for he knew that blame would somehow fall on him.

Then the prison doctor was sent for in hot haste, and he came promptly. But, on examination of the body, he pronounced Sir Richard Harrington to be beyond the reach of earthly aid, as of earthly punishment. Life was quite extinct. There was no pulse, no throb of the heart, only a little faint warmth lingering, which showed that death had been recent.

"Only a few minutes, I should say—probably he hesitated until the time drew near!" pronounced the doctor.

Even before the arrival of the medical man the means of the suicide had been discovered. Among the pillows, close to the dead man's passive hand, lay a small purple phial, uncorked and empty. The doctor examined it as well as at the moment was practicable. It contained but a drop or two of some dark-colored liquid that had a sickly smell, as of fruit or flowers of some strange sort.

"An Indian drug, I dare say. Something he brought from the East with him and contrived to conceal," said the doctor. "It has done its work quickly and smoothly too, for there is no trace of pain upon the face, as you see."

And so it was. Sir Richard Harrington, with all his sins upon his head, had gone out of the world to front the Judgment Seat.

On the table, beside the untouched breakfast, lay a couple of sheets of paper covered with writing that was evidently fresh, for the pen lay beside the paper.

There was also, carefully closed, and directed to

"SIR LIONEL HARRINGTON, BART."

*"Not to be opened by any hands but those of
my brother, on his return,"*

a sealed packet, the red wax bearing the usual impress of Sir Richard's signet, with the Harrington arms.

The other document, left purposely open, as if to court

inspection, was not addressed to any person. It was signed, however, in a bold hand,

“ RICHARD HARRINGTON,
Late of Greystone Abbey.”

“ The poor, misguided man,” groaned the governor, “ has apparently chosen to leave behind him some written statement—perhaps a confession—which I suppose the judges ought to have placed before them when their lordships come into court.”

“ Quite true ! ” answered the doctor, who was the coolest of the party, glancing at his watch ; “ but we, who have found the body, may as well, colonel, make ourselves acquainted with its contents before we go further.”

The governor took up the paper, and in an unsteady voice read aloud, as follows :—

“ When these pages are read, I shall be beyond the reach of the disgrace and ignominy of a public trial for a crime which I did not commit, and of which I am absolutely innocent ; and of what affects me far more and more bitterly, the remorseful remembrance of a sin which I did commit, but which, so far as I know, is, up to the present moment, wholly unknown to any one in England save myself.

“ The sudden intelligence of the death of my father, Sir George, which Lionel and I received while serving with our Lancer regiment in India, caused me—Richard Harrington—to conceive a plan so wicked and so subtle, that I have often since marveled as to whether the idea was not due to the promptings of the arch-fiend himself. The scheme was nothing less than to get my elder brother, now Sir Lionel, out of the way, so that I and no other might secure the immediate enjoyment of the title and estates.

“ I do not, bad as I am, desire to be misconstrued ; nor would I paint myself in blacker colors than truth requires. I never for a moment contemplated fratricide. My brother’s death formed no part of my project. But what I devised for him was the fate to which Joseph was condemned by the envy of his brethren. Ruthlessly, treacherously, I sold him into bondage. My accomplice in this villainous scheme was the reigning Rajah of Futtehpore, Amarat Rao. This prince, who had taken a fancy to

myself, and with whom I was on good terms, I knew to be unscrupulous, daring, and wishful for money, since his revenues were all too small to keep pace with his lavish expenditure. I readily persuaded him that, could we but get Lionel supposed to be dead, and myself the heir to Grey-stone, there would be wealth for him as well as for me, since a few thousands a year, which I could easily spare, would be a welcome addition to the Rajah's income. Amarat Rao came at once into the plan, and volunteered his own palace as the place in which my brother should be kept secluded from the world, confident as he was of the discretion of his large household of guards and servants.

"The idea of an attack by banditti on the convoy of treasure that was to be sent across the forest, under a slight escort, was due to Amarat Rao's wily brain. Some of his own soldiers, picked men who could be trusted, disguised themselves for this purpose as common robbers or dacoits, and the ambuscade was formed, and the onslaught made, without raising a suspicion that the aggressors had any motive but plunder. I acted, on this occasion, the part of a decoy duck, since it was at my instigation that Lionel offered to accompany the convoy, taking the place of another officer who was suffering from some trifling indisposition, while I went with him as a volunteer. Strict orders had been given to the supposed bandits not to slay a Feringhee, but in the heat of the scuffle such instructions were readily forgotten, and both my brother and myself, as well as the mounted British orderlies and the paymaster who went with us, had some narrow escapes. As for the native attendants, they were butchered like sheep, without mercy or scruple. This slaughter, and the looting of Government treasure, were thought necessary to give color to the report, believed by all, that the affray had been with some gang of commonplace marauders. Lionel was surrounded, unhorsed, and stunned, and borne away, blindfolded, by a circuitous route, to the palace that was to be his prison.

"My own part I acted well. When I came galloping into camp breathless and bareheaded, to summon my own regiment to my brother's aid, all put faith, as well they might—Heaven pardon me—in the sincerity of my grief and anxiety. I kept the search for my brother on foot till all were weary, and feigned the distress which all who

knew us believed to be real. Then came the next act in the drama. It had been arranged that some positive proof of Lionel's death should be forthcoming. Had he continued to be merely missing, conjectures would have been rife as to what could have become of him, and some one might even have guessed the truth. But if a corpse, supposed to be his, could but be found, identified, and removed to England for ceremonious burial the way to the succession, both to title and estates, would lie smooth before me, and I should become at once the acknowledged baronet. I it was who contrived this, the central feature of the plot. The Rajah had informed me, half carelessly, of the illness of a European dependent of his, who had sickened of cholera—then raging—and whom the native Hakim who attended him had given up for lost. My suggestion that, when this man died, his body should be attired in the uniform my brother had worn, and be discovered, as if accidentally, in the forest, was eagerly acceded to by the prince, Amarat Rao, and was acted upon.

“Here, again, the comedy was well kept up. Motee, the prince's confidential servant, came to my quarters with a plausible account of how my brother had been found in the jungle, speechless and dying, by Pariah charcoal burners, who had removed him to their own wretched hovel, and the young officers and the doctor who accompanied me when I hastened to the lonely hut were readily induced to believe that the body found in that miserable abode, and clad in the uniform of our regiment, was that of my brother, Sir Lionel. No difficulty presented itself, thus, in substituting the corpse of a stranger for that of Captain Harrington, and I was able to complete the imposture by causing the body to be carried to England, and publicly committed to the family vault at Greystone. I was then quite unaware of the name of the English hanger-on of Amarat Rao, and little dreamed that I should live to be hunted to death as his murderer. I declare now, on the very eve of death, that never once in his lifetime did I set my eyes on Walter Travis, and that his very personality was to me unknown.

“I became lord of Greystone Abbey and its broad lands and rich mines without let or hindrance. On the contrary, I found myself the object of universal sympathy and goodwill. My Indian accomplice, as might have been expected,

abused his position by extortionate demands to which I had no choice but to submit, but even that would not much have troubled me had but my mind been at ease. As it was, I never knew a happy hour. The sting of remorse, feverish unrest, the turning to gall and bitterness of all the pleasures that the world most values, such were the wages of my crime ; such the reward I reaped for the betrayal of a loving, trusting brother. And yet—though few will believe me—even when I concocted, in concert with the Rajah, the infamous plot against Lionel's liberty, I loved him still as I had done since our boyhood, and as I do now, now, when as I write there stands within reach of my hand the deadly draught that is to hurry me out of the world. Yes, I had still the old affection for him whom I left in the vile hands of an Eastern tyrant, but whom I had deliberately sacrificed to ambition and greed. I suppose I am a moral monster. I seem to shudder when I try to fathom the depths of my own guilty heart, and strive to pray for pardon. I, as I look back to my brief period of prosperity and ill-got wealth, declare that I would sooner have spent the time as the servant of the dear brother I have wronged, and who I trust will one day learn to forgive me for my great sin against him.

“ I adjure those who read these my last words to lose no time in taking steps to liberate Sir Lionel, my brother, now immured in the Palace of the Rajah of Futtehpore, and whom the last letter I received from the prince declared to be in good health, though dejected and unhappy. Amarat Rao cannot resist the superior force at the British Resident's command, and the captive's rescue would be easy and prompt. I desire that the sealed packet which I leave, addressed to Sir Lionel, should be kept sacred until it is placed, intact, in his hands, on his return to take possession of his own. And I protest, on the oath of a dying man, that I am innocent of the blood of that wretched Walter Travis, whom I never saw till he was placed, dead, in the coffin that was supposed to be my brother's, and whose name I first heard after my return to England. Now I must drink the poison. I do not wish to live. It is better so.

“ (Signed), RICHARD HARRINGTON.”

Scarcely had the governor ceased reading when the sounds of bustle and voices arose from below. "The sheriff!" whispered the head warder; and Colonel Wood at once turned towards the door, and, with one glance at the quiet figure on the bed, sadly and reverently withdrew, followed by the rest.

CHAPTER LIX.

IN THE COURT HOUSE.

THE Court House, where the trial for murder was to take place, was crowded to suffocation, so numerous were the spectators. On the magistrates' bench room had been found, as usual, for sundry distinguished lookers-on, over and above the justices of the peace, and sundry ladies had been accommodated with chairs, close, as Lady Sparkleton expressed it, to the stage.

The Bar mustered strongly, since a wig and gown act on these occasions as a pass ticket that the strictest janitor cannot gainsay, and there was a great deal of curiosity afloat as to how this important case would be concluded. The judges, in their scarlet and ermine, the sheriff in his court suit, the jury in their box, the Crown counsel, and the eminent advocates engaged for the defence, police, witnesses, newspaper reporters, all were there, and all waited, with exemplary calmness at first, then more impatiently, for the arrival of the prisoner.

Would Sir Richard never be brought into court? It was very odd. What could occasion a delay so unusual, so disrespectful, even, to British Justice? Watches were consulted. There was a buzz of conversation and inquiry. Heads were turned, as by a common impulse, at any sound, however distant. Yes, it was very strange!

A quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, and no sign of the arrival of the accused. The talking in court grew louder, and yet was unreprieved by tipstaff or usher. Presently the grave judges bent down their wigged heads and exchanged a few words. Then "Mr. Sheriff" was invoked. The sheriff, looking very nervous and fussy, set off at once, with two of his javelin men in attendance, for the gaol.

The barristers looked at one another. The spectators felt a chill, as of disappointment, creeping over them. Were they to be baulked, after all, of the show they had come for?

Then there was a stir and a hum of low, eager voices, as in came Colonel Wood, in company with the sheriff, the head warder, the prison doctor, and the chief of the police. The governor looked pale and agitated.

"Very sorry, my lords—bearer of bad news!"—he stammered out as soon as he had made his way near enough to the Bench—"Sir Richard Harrington, the prisoner, is no more."

One of the judges was deaf, and the governor's voice was low and broken.

"I don't hear him. What does he mean?" demanded the judge, peevishly.

"He says the prisoner is dead," explained the other wearer of ermine. "Go on, sir; tell us what has happened."

"The prisoner has destroyed himself—has taken poison, my lord. He was stone dead when we found him," faltered out the governor, and at the news of the tragedy that had occurred, there was an end of all semblance of decorous order in the court, and an outburst of excited voices arose, all seeming to speak, and none to listen. Pity, horror, amazement were freely expressed. And, strange to say, such is the inconsistency of human nature, many who had been sure of the baronet's guilt began, now, to waver in their estimate of the evidence against him, and to entertain the uncomfortable idea that an innocent man had, perhaps, been hounded out of the world by persistent persecution. Then silence was restored, for all were anxious to hear more.

Colonel Wood, the governor, had but little to tell in answer to the questions that were put to him. The prisoner, who had seemed cast down, but not by any means frantic or excited, had been sought, as usual in such cases, in his room in the governor's house, and had been found dead on his bed. A bottle, that had contained some unknown poison, probably a drug brought by himself from India, lay empty beside him.

Sir Richard had left on the table a written confession or statement, just penned and signed by him. He had also

left a sealed packet, addressed to a near relative. There was the other paper for their lordships to peruse.

There was tiptoe eagerness of curiosity in court as the judges, not without some visible emotion, one by one, ran their eyes over the last lines traced by the hand of him who was now beyond earthly vengeance. Then two or three of the magistrates and the sheriff were called up to look at the document, which they, too, read hastily through, and next something was said and settled as to a coroner's inquest to be held on the ensuing day. Then, after the senior judge had uttered a few severe remarks as to the negligence or undue indulgence which had led to the fiasco of the day, the court broke up. There could be no trial. Nothing remained but to disperse.

The assemblage broke up, so far as the majority of those who composed it were concerned, with much the feelings of a Roman crowd trooping out of the amphitheatre without their promised treat of beasts and gladiators slain, or of Christians thrown to the lions.

The craving for excitement is in some natures so strong and so unthinking that it is not necessarily cruel, even when the food it feeds upon is the suffering of another.

Probably, except Mavina Malstock, not a single enemy of the prisoner could be counted among the throng, but there were many who felt it hard to have been cheated of a spectacle more thrilling, because real, than anything which the stage could exhibit. After all, there had been something horrible, something mysterious, too, even if they had lost the satisfaction of seeing a man of rank and fortune placed in the dock like any common criminal.

Perhaps those most to be pitied were the purveyors for the daily press. They had come down to report the trial of exceptional interest, and there was no trial to give occupation to their practiced pens. To be sure, there was a suicide. Crisp little telegrams would convey that news to titillate the nerves of readers. The telegrams, too, would drop a hint that there was more to tell than leaded capitals could supply.

The confession which the unhappy Sir Richard had left behind him would be pabulum for the public curiosity. The document itself, after being scanned by the judges, the sheriff, and the more active of the magistrates, had been handed back to the governor of the gaol, no doubt to be produced at the inquest.

But the governor could be interviewed. In these days the Sphynx, or a Rosicrucian of the Middle Ages, or a priest of Isis would have been tormented into revealing all that was kept discreetly dark ; and special correspondents are ingenious in applying the moral thumbscrew that unseals reluctant lips.

The magistrates, too, knew something, and so did the sheriff and so did the prison doctor, and each and all of these personages had to submit to interrogatories more pleasantly put, but not less peremptory, than those of a continental commissary of police.

Nor is it surprising that the telegraph officials of Wortham had an unusual amount of work to do that day, and that the clicking of the brass instruments was incessant as fresh statements were sent hurrying along the electric wire to London.

Meanwhile the permanent dwellers at Wortham had matters to occupy their thoughts quite independently of the thirst for news on the part of those who catered for metropolitan journals. The coroner had been informed that his services would be required on the morrow, and the good men and true, who were to compose his jury, had also to be bespoken for their useful functions. The attendance of certain medical experts had to be provided for. Arrangements, too, had to be made for the present care, and ultimate interment, of the body of Sir Richard Harrington.

The usual professional watchers of the dead were of course called in to discharge their melancholy duties, and the chief upholsterer of Wortham was busy in preparing a coffin, with pall of black velvet, and handles and name-plate in simple silver, since the funeral would probably be of a quiet and unostentatious sort.

That there would be a decorous, if quiet, funeral was taken for granted. We have made a step or two in civilization beyond our immediate ancestors, and should be shocked at the notion of waging war, as they did, against the dead. No cross roads now, no corpse drawn on a hurdle to the shameful place of burial, no stake driven through the heart, as if the poor maddened suicide had been a vampire of Eastern superstition, and might be expected to come back again and work evil, if not made safe in this barbaric fashion, which was not repugnant to our grandfathers.

Yes, Richard Harrington, baronet or no baronet, would be allowed, no doubt, to rest in peace, when once the inquest should be over, and the convenient verdict which modern sentiment dictates pronounced by those who in such cases have to arbitrate.

Mr. Parker, agent for the Greystone property, was going to and fro, and attending to the preparations for the decent interment of his late employer, all the time sorely exercised in his mind as to who was the present owner of the Abbey. Could it be possible that the dead Sir Lionel was really in the land of the living, soon to come back and take possession of his own? Time would show.

CHAPTER L.

TOO LATE!

It was the evening of the eventful day which was to have witnessed the trial of him who was still called Sir Richard Harrington, and the shadows were closing in, and the street lamps and the lights in shop windows beginning to twinkle. Wortham Gaol had become quiet again, and Colonel Wood, the governor, after a hard and worrying day, for the special correspondents had been as busy with him as terriers around a badger, was sitting down at last to his delayed dinner. Then, as he was adjusting his napkin, a cab came dashing up to the door; there was a clang of the bell, and after a brief parley without, two strange gentlemen, travel worn, weary, but too intent upon the object of their journey to heed conventional disturbances, came hurrying in, with some semblance of apology for the intrusion.

"I hope I am not too late!" exclaimed the first and younger of the two, a man of noble presence, whose golden hair matched well with his blue eyes and handsome features. I am Lionel Harrington, and I have hurried on here, night and day, to save my brother the shame and pain of a trial for a crime which he is innocent of, as I can now, I am glad to say, fully prove. Am I in time? I hope so, for I have not lost a moment since we left India!"

All this was said so eagerly, and with such excitement,

that the governor, who had sprung to his feet, could not get the opportunity of replying by word or look.

"Excuse me," said the other new comer, a big, bronzed man, with a flowing beard, "my friend's feelings—allow me to introduce him, sir, as Sir Lionel Harrington—my own name is Lord Norham—have been more than he could restrain, and I am not surprised that you should wonder at the suddenness of our entry. We are fresh from India, have traveled without delay or rest, and have come direct here from the railway station. I hope your rules will not refuse us the privilege of an immediate interview with Sir Richard—or Mr. Richard Harrington—for whom we bring good news."

The governor bowed and rubbed his hands, and offered chairs to his visitors, but was obviously at his wits' end for something to say.

"I should have no objection—" he stammered out—"indeed, my lord, I feel very deeply for all concerned in this unhappy affair—but this has come upon me so suddenly that I hardly know how to act in this strange and painful position that is forced upon me."

"We have pushed on to our journey's end," pursued Lord Norham, "hoping to be in time to make representations to those in authority that would avert the need for a trial. I only trust," he added, marking the governor's agitated demeanor, "that our hope is not fallacious."

Good-natured Colonel Wood had been much shaken by the events of the day. He was miserable at this new task before him, and yet he saw no way out of it.

"The trial would have taken place this very day," he said, nervously, "had not poor Sir Richard—" He paused here.

"My brother is ill, perhaps?" asked Sir Lionel, anxiously.

Lord Norham, who was cooler, saw by the governor's manner that it was worse than that.

"I fear you have bad news for us?" he said, softly.

"I have indeed," faltered out the kindly governor, "my late prisoner is beyond the reach of earthly pain."

"Dead—Richard—to whom I came to bring a message of hope and good-will—my brother dead—I cannot believe it!" burst out Sir Lionel, and then the strong man's nerves gave way, and he sobbed aloud.

“Is it—,” Lord Norham began, but Colonel Wood took on him to answer the unfinished question.

“It is, my lord, as you no doubt have guessed,” he said, in a low tone, which, nevertheless, reached Sir Lionel’s ear as well as that of his companion; “the prisoner had, unsuspected by us, a phial of poison in his possession, and he this morning swallowed the contents just before it came our duty to summon him to accompany us to the Court House. He was dead when we entered the room—a quick and painless death, as all signs showed.”

It was not immediately that the surviving brother was able to moderate the transport of passionate sorrow that overpowered him, and to hear with some approach to calmness the little which Colonel Wood had to relate. The facts were simple. The prisoner—who, by permission of the visiting magistrates, had been treated with much indulgence—had been for months in a low-spirited state, but quite quiet and composed. He had received frequent visits from his solicitors and other members of the legal profession engaged for his defence, and one, the day before the trial, from a lady. The lady was one whom Sir Richard had known in India—Mrs. Stone, now of Saxham Towers. He had seemed to the warder, who was the last person who saw him alive, deeply dejected, but not more so than had been the case for some weeks. His unexpected self-destruction had taken everyone by surprise; and none more so than his family solicitors, Messrs. Tatham & Gudge. The inquest was for the morrow.

Sir Lionel expressed a wish to be allowed to see his brother’s remains, and to this request the governor at once acceded. The watchers were called away, and the two travelers were inducted into the dreary room where, on the bed, lay all that was mortal of the late master of Greystone Abbey. Sir Lionel gazed for a minute on the pale, still face of the brother whom, in his noble heart, he had forgiven, unasked, for so much of wrong and perfidy, and then knelt beside the bed, and, throwing his arms around the prostrate form, buried his head between them, and sobbed aloud in such an agony of distress that the governor glanced apprehensively at Lord Norham.

“Let him weep,” whispered the latter, softly. “The poor fellow has gone through a cruel time of it in India, and is weakened by fasting and fatigue; but his is a man’s

nature, and it was better that he should learn the worst at once. He came hastening here on an errand of love and mercy, and now, alas, we are too late !”

“By one short day too late !” assented the governor. After a time Sir Lionel’s grief abated, and Lord Norham, with some difficulty, drew him away. The intention of the future marquess had been to proceed to Hurst Royal with his rescued friend, but this was now not to be thought of, and it was settled that the travelers should spend the night at the hotel, to await the inquest, and arrange for the removal of Richard Harrington’s body to Greystone Abbey.

CHAPTER LI.

THE SEALED PACKET.

THE inquest passed over decorously and smoothly enough, and with every desire on the part of those concerned in it to spare the feelings of the returned Sir Lionel, for whom much natural sympathy was expressed. Sir Lionel and Lord Norham were both, under the circumstances of the case, permitted to tender evidence, the purport of which was to clear the memory of the deceased from the stigma that had attached to it.

Motee, the Rajah’s confidential servant, had not only divulged all the details of the scheme for substituting the corpse of Walter Travis, after his death by cholera, for that of Sir Lionel Harrington, but had kept his promise of handing over to Lord Norham sundry papers and memoranda in the handwriting of Travis himself, and which had been secreted by Motee in the hope of one day finding a market for them.

Walter Travis, in the tolerably connected notes which he had roughly jotted down, and which were now produced in the coroner’s humble court, never once made mention of Richard Harrington. But there were repeated allusions to another young officer of the Lancer regiment, a certain Sub-Lieutenant Hollis, who had grossly insulted the adventurer at a tavern where billiards were played, in Futtehpore, and who had given or accepted a challenge to

fight a duel. It was clear, from a later entry among the memoranda, that such a duel in the jungle did take place, and that it was not fairly conducted.

"Graham, of the Lancers, who stood second to him, owned that Hollis, his principal, had behaved as badly as could be in firing first. I was hit before I had time to get my pistol lifted. And Walsh, who stood by me in the affair, used stronger language still."

As for the evidence of the native servants who professed to have attended their master, Richard Harrington, to the edge of the jungle on the morning of the duel, Motee easily induced the syce and grass-cutter, who had really been in the employment of Mr. Hollis, to confess that they had been suborned by Govind, Sir Richard's discarded mussaulchee, to claim the latter as their master. As for the rogue Govind himself, who was a known thief and perjurer, he had absconded on hearing that Motee, with the Kotwall's assistance, was inquiring into his conduct; and there could be no doubt that he had merely thrust himself forward to make profit of Jasper Holt's eagerness to collect proofs against Sir Richard Harrington, and had used the more illiterate natives as tools for his purpose.

In addition to this, and to the deposition of the ex-Rajah's Parsee secretary, well cognizant of the plot for passing off one body for another, there was produced in court a letter received by the British Resident at Futteh-pore two days before Lord Norham and Sir Lionel left that place. This was written by a certain Mr. James Walsh, manager of an indigo plantation in some out-of-the-way district of Lower Bengal, and lately a resident in the neighborhood of Futteh-pore, where he had been employed in some similar capacity. This Englishman wrote to say that he had just seen, for the first time, a newspaper report of Sir Richard's impending trial for the murder of Walter Travis, and wrote at once to state the truth. The truth, according to the straightforward declaration of Mr. Walsh, was that he stood second to his acquaintance, Walter Travis, in a duel fought in the bush. That the name of the latter's adversary, who had forced the quarrel on him with wanton insolence, was Hollis, and not Harrington; that Mr. Hollis fired with unfair promptitude, wounding Travis, whose pistol went off as he fell; and that only the entreaties of Lieutenant Graham induced Walsh himself,

who was indignant at what he deemed an attempt at murder, to consent that the business should be hushed up. "I can keep silence no longer, and will vouch for the truth of what I say before any tribunal, and at any personal inconvenience," wrote Mr. Walsh, "now that an innocent man like this Sir Richard, who is a total stranger to me, and I believe to Travis also, is accused of what he never did."

There was a murmur of pity and surprise in court when these statements were read out. The facts of Sir Lionel's capture and incarceration were touched upon as lightly as possible, and what was dwelt upon was the strange revelation that threw light on the tissue of circumstantial evidence on the strength of which Sir Richard had been all but condemned.

"I think, gentlemen, you will agree with me, that the late unfortunate Sir Richard's absolute innocence of the presumed murder of Walter Travis has been fully substantiated," said the coroner, and there was not a dissentient voice amongst jury or spectators. Then followed the mild verdict:—

"*Felo de se*, while suffering under temporary insanity occasioned by mental distress."

And then there was nothing left but to authorize the removal of the body to Greystone Abbey, there to await the funeral.

The funeral was as quietly and modestly managed as it could possibly be, in the melancholy circumstances of the case, nor were any invitations issued. Yet, somehow, as a mark of respect to the family of Harrington, many persons insisted on attending it, and the Most Noble the Marquess of Cheviot was among those who went to see the coffin of Richard Harrington, followed, as chief mourner, by the brother he had wronged, laid to rest in the vault of Greystone church.

On returning to his own sad home, Sir Lionel shut himself up in his own room, and there opened the sealed packet directed to himself, and which the governor of the prison had duly made over to its proper recipient.

It was not without deep emotion that the present lord of the old Abbey perused what had been written on the very eve of the desperate act which had finished his brother's most unhappy career.

The sealed packet, when opened, proved to enclose a second and smaller enclosure, also sealed, and addressed to Lady Egeria Fitzurse. What was meant for Sir Lionel's perusal consisted merely of these words :—

"My dear, dear brother, for dear you are still to me as you have been, ever and always, I ask you to believe that during the whole of these miserable months there has not been one day on which the memory of our old affection did not haunt me. I never ceased to feel remorse for the evil I had done to you.

"I do not, Lionel, venture to crave your pardon. I do not deserve it. I try by my death to expiate my crime, and I only ask of you, dear brother, to think sometimes kindly of me. I have always done so of you, but then, to be sure, I am guilty, and you innocent. Farewell !

"RICHARD HARRINGTON."

This letter, which Sir Lionel read and re-read, was blistered by the tears that fell on it. As for that addressed to Lady Egeria, the baronet put it aside.

"I will deliver this myself," he said. "And to-morrow I trust I shall feel equal to crossing the threshold of Hurst Royal. Poor fellow ! his last words shall not be neglected."

CHAPTER LII.

ZENOBIA'S LAST FAREWELL.

"INDEED, indeed you must believe me, Captain Redmayne. You should not persist in this, nor press any longer for an answer different from that which I have been compelled to give. It can but cause pain to your own heart—pain to us both, but to you the most."

Thus spoke Zenobia Stone, in her luxurious drawing-room at the Towers, surrounded by all that money could buy, and by nothing else worth the having.

For the second time had Harry Redmayne stormed her door, in defiance of the strictest orders given to her trembling Oriental servants, and fairly forced his way into her presence. He looked very wan, ill and wild-eyed, this handsome guardsman, who had found his life so joyous until the tyrant Love laid hold of him and warped his very nature. He had come again to offer marriage to the

Begum of Saxham Towers, well knowing what the acceptance of such an offer entailed upon him. He should be estranged from his family. Well, let the estrangement come, since his own people at Old Court were so prejudiced against her he loved. His native country would not countenance his bride, his old friends would shake their heads over his infatuation, he might even have to leave the Guards, so compromising was the alliance he contemplated, but he was ready to give up all if Zenobia would but, by his side, face the world.

But the Begum, though she pitied him, was quite steadfast in her refusal.

"Harry," she said, presently, in reply to another passionate appeal from the rejected suitor, "the time will come when you will thank me for what you now call cruelty. And, were I to let myself be softened into a foolish consent, full well do I know that the time would come when you would curse me for having listened to you. You beg me, dear, to let me blight your life. You would take me to your bosom, with my dowry of the world's frowns and ill word. Believe me, you would repent of it ere very long, for I should soon be old, and you would find yourself the disappointed husband of a woman for whom you would have ceased to care. You had better leave me and think of me, now and then, as a friend whose firmness saved you from shipwreck irreparable."

"You wrong yourself and you wrong me," was Harry's indignant answer. "What matter, Zenobia, the cold counsels of worldly prudence in such a case as ours? I love you! I love you so much that I would not have you other than what you are, a noble, beautiful woman, unfairly dealt with by uncharitable tongues and spiteful gossips. Come with me, and let us set our home where you will, far from these unprovoked enemies of yours, and be true to one another for weal or woe. Two hearts like ours are not to be kept apart at Mrs. Grundy's dictation, surely. It should be enough for us, Zenobia, that we love."

He tried to take her hand as he uttered these desperate words, but she withdrew it, and her great, dark eyes met his with a strange expression in them that was almost menacing.

"You had better go—leave me, and forget me!" she said, in her rich, low tones.

He shook his head. "Never!" he answered; "my love, my worship of you, give me the right to be heard."

"Better accept my reply as final, and let us be friends," she said, in guarded accents; "I am sorry for you, but it cannot be as you wish."

Harry Redmayne told her that he valued nothing on earth as he valued her, and that his devotion deserved kinder treatment at her hands. He was the truest of lovers. He would be the tenderest of husbands. He knew, he said, that in her heart she cared for him, and she ought not, out of wounded pride or silly scruples, to say him nay.

"For you love me, Zenobia?"

"You *will* wring the truth from me, then," said Zenobia, with a sigh, but with that expression of menace yet in her lustrous eyes; "be warned, and go!"

It was not in Harry's nature to yield on such a point. He tried again to take her hand. This time she did not withdraw it; and it lay in his, passive and marble cold.

"Captain Redmayne," she said, in her old, imperious manner, "I have tried to spare you, but you will not be spared; learn then the truth. I do not love you. Flattered I have been, and touched by your addresses, and I have liked you well, but that was all. If ever I cared for any man on earth it was Richard Harrington. Him, with all his sins upon his head, I did love; nay, I love his memory to the last."

Harry started as if a serpent had bitten him with its venomous fangs. In all his misgivings, in all his trouble, he had borne about with him, as a talisman, the conviction that he was beloved by Zenobia, though self-will or caution made her reject his suit. Now, every word of her last speech had come home to his heart as a stab. His brain reeled, and he gasped for breath.

"You only say this to try me!" he said, hoarsely.

The Begum's answer was firmly spoken: "I said the truth!"

The guardsman groaned aloud, and hid his face between his hands; then, silently, he turned towards the door.

"Stay, let us part as friends. You will know soon why I wish it," exclaimed Zenobia, laying her hand lightly on his arm.

He made one or two efforts to speak, but no sound.

passed his lips. Then, mechanically, he took the hand she offered him.

“Good-bye!” he said, in a slow, broken voice; and then, almost as a blind man would have done, groped his way out of the room.

Zenobia smiled strangely as she moved a pace or two so as to be able to touch the handle of the bell, and thus apprise the servants of her visitor’s exit.

She went to a window, full of hothouse flowers on a gilded stand, which commanded a view of the park, and watched Harry Redmayne as, with slow step and downcast air, he walked away down the leafy avenue until his form was lost to sight. Then, with the same strange smile upon her face, she went back to her sofa, and lounged once more among the silken cushions, thinking deeply.

There was a table within her reach strewn with costly toys, Eastern and European. She took from it a little dagger, with a ruby-eyed serpent, in yellow gold, twisted around its jeweled handle, and drew the blue, keen blade of the tiny weapon from its rich sheath. It was the dagger she had brought with her from India, and of which she had once made mention to Sir Richard on the occasion of their first meeting on English ground, a poniard by which the slightest wound would prove fatal. She took it up now, and examined the thin, sharp point and edge scrutinizingly, and then—surely that was a small stream of blood, that crimson thread trickling from her rounded white wrist, just above the gemmed bracelet! She made no effort to stanch the blood, nor did she call for assistance, but lay back among her soft silken cushions, and presently seemed to sleep, though so lightly that her very breathing was imperceptible.

The Indian servant who, hours afterwards, came gliding into the room, found his mistress reclining among the silken cushions, her eyes open and fixed, her pale lips slightly parted, so that the pearly teeth within were faintly visible, and her attitude that of one who sleeps. But the dried blood that clung to her wrist, the dagger clasped by her stiffening fingers, the tell-tale spot of crimson on the white velvet of the costly carpet, told the truth to the quick-eyed Hindoo all too surely. This was no sleep, but the dread slumber that shall know no waking in this world.

Soon the news spread through the household, through the hamlet near, and reached Wortham, whither a mounted messenger rode at full speed to summon medical aid. But Dr. Malstock, when he came, found he could do nothing. All the Faculty, in such a case, would have been as helpless to minister assistance, as were the weeping native ayahs and bearers who surrounded their dead mistress, or the English domestics whispering to one another in the background. That the poisoned dagger had been fraught with some subtle venom Dr. Malstock at once conjectured. The wound itself was the veriest scratch, such as might well be the result of accident. And to accident or rashness it seemed most charitable to attribute the untoward event.

Poor Zenobia ! From the first she had been more sinned against than sinning : rather the scapegoat for others than one who deserved social outlawry, to a woman the direst of dooms. Some of us are so heavily handicapped in the race of life as to seem destined to misfortune, and the Begum, with all her gold and all her beauty, was of this luckless company. She had had little teaching, and of true maternal care had known nothing, so that her very charms, her very wealth, had been to her rather as curses than as blessings, from the first.

There was peace, now, it may be hoped, for that wild and wayward heart, not ungenerous, not unfeeling, not sordid, but so utterly undisciplined as to be a lure to destruction rather than a beacon on the path to what was right. She was dead, very, very soon after him she had loved, and on whom she had bestowed the fatal gift that prevented his presence in the Court House at Wortham on the very day of his injured brother's return.

CHAPTER LIII.

LADY EGERIA OWNS SHE LOVES HIM.

IN the same stately drawing-room at Hurst Royal, with its outlook over park and lakelet and the wild blue hills beyond, into which, near the commencement of this story, Sir Richard had been ushered on the occasion of his first visit, was the beautiful daughter of the ancient house of

Fitzurse. Not alone, however. The real baronet, the real master of Greystone, was with her. Sir Lionel had, in pursuance of the intention he had expressed, called at Hurst Royal on the day after his brother's funeral, and had found Lady Egeria at home and by herself.

The marquess was absent ; indeed, he was among his colliers of Silverseam, now converts to loyalty, and who were perhaps in higher favor with the old nobleman than if there had been no interlude of anarchy and estrangement. And Lord Norham was at Old Court, where Harry Redmayne was truly reported to be in a desperate and miserable frame of mind, since the sudden and suspicious death of the woman who by crossing his path had wrecked his life.

Sir Lionel had placed in Lady Egeria's hands the tiny packet, sealed with red wax, and directed to herself, which his brother had committed to his care. She had opened it with trembling fingers, and with a sort of awe, such as we feel when in the presence of the newly dead. The writing swam before her eyes as she tried to read, for tears would rise in them. She made an effort and went on with the perusal.

" I love you very dearly, and none the less," such were the simple words penned, almost at the last, by the unhappy writer, " because I was quite unworthy of one so good and pure and noble and lovely as yourself. And, in all my ill-doing and my gnawing remorse, your bright image has been with me, waking and sleeping, worshipped ever, but as a star wholly out of my reach. I know my own baseness too well. I was not fit to be the mate of such a one as you. And yet the one feeling of which I am not ashamed has been that love for your dear self, Egeria, the one sentiment that seemed to hallow even me. May you be happy ! Your choice could never fall on one not worthy of you, such as I, in this last hour of repentance and despair, own myself to be. Yet I loved you—love you to the last. Pray, pray, be merciful in your judgment ; think sometimes, with pity, of

" RICHARD HARRINGTON."

Not only Lady Egeria, but Sir Lionel as well, was deeply affected by the perusal of these few lines, traced but a few minutes before the fatal plunge into the dim abyss of the

unknown. There was something strangely sad in the reflection that, but for the rashness of that desperate deed, the miserable man might have been rescued and saved by the arrival of a brother who was all forgiveness and chivalry, and who came armed with the proofs of his innocence of the charge that had seemed so crushing.

"Poor fellow ; he too loved you !" said Sir Lionel, presently.

"He did," replied Lady Egeria, drooping her beautiful eyes before the young man's gaze ; "and twice he asked me to be his wife, and deep as was the debt of gratitude I owed—for did he not save my life, at the risk of his own, at Blackwater Tarn?—still I could not bring myself to regard him otherwise than as a friend. And as a friend I sorrow for his loss," she added, sobbing.

Somehow, it was never quite remembered how, by either of the two, Sir Lionel, in his efforts to console Lady Egeria, told her of his deep love for herself, told her how, in his Indian captivity, his thoughts by day and dreams by night had been of her, and that the remembrance of her, when he felt that he might never see England again, had grown to be almost maddening to him. Slowly, but surely, at the sound of his pleading voice, the beautiful statue seemed to thaw as if actual marble, chiselled by some Grecian sculptor's deathless art, had by magic warmed and brightened into living, loving humanity, and changed from the image into the woman. Sir Lionel asked her to be his wife. She did not at once reply, but trembled and looked down—she who had been so proud, so cold, and now was like a shy village maiden hearkening to a tale of love. Sir Lionel took her unresisting hand in his.

"I have treasured up the thoughts of you, dearest," he said, "ever since I first left England for India, and took blame to myself for the foolish hesitation that had kept my lips sealed when I might have spoken. But I had feared—I own it—to risk all on an avowal. You might have repulsed me, and then I should have had a heavy heart indeed to take across the seas with me."

Lady Egeria lifted her head with the action of a startled fawn. She turned her face, coyly, towards her lover. There was a glorious light in those lovely eyes of hers that never had been seen there before.

"You—you might have spoken to me, Lionel, at the

time you left me," she said, in her sweet, clear tones, and never did music so welcome fall upon Sir Lionel's ear as the acknowledgment which they implied. He raised her hand to his lips and covered it with kisses.

"Yes," said Lady Egeria at a later period in their conversation—"yes, Lionel, I have always loved you. When you went away I was so sad, dear, though none knew or suspected it. And when we heard of what had chanced in India, and I mourned you as dead, in my own heart I vowed that I would never marry—never belong to another for your sake. That it was that made me seem the icicle that I was deemed to be. That it was that steeled me, I doubt not, against all that your poor brother could urge on his own behalf. I could not care for him, you see—" she added, again, with that soft radiance in her clear blue eyes—"I could not, Lionel, because—I loved you already."

Sir Lionel Harrington was the happiest of men. All that he had undergone during the galling period of his imprisonment, all the care and sorrow he had known since, seemed to be atoned for in a moment by that one flush of triumphant joy. To love and to be loved again, simple, world-old secret of happiness that nothing on this earth can equal!

That one delicious hour in which he found that the proud beauty on whom he had set his hopes had been as true to his memory as she was tender towards his restored presence was worth any meed of worldly success that ever statesman or hero achieved. A noble-looking pair the lovers were as ever met beneath that ancient roof since the half-mythic visit of Edward, Confessor and King, to the mansion of his Norman Vavasour. On the morrow, of course, the marquess must be asked for his sanction to the betrothal that was now exchanged. But, for the present, Sir Lionel, when he went back to Greystone Abbey, would not have changed places with the loftiest in England.

CHAPTER LIV.

MAVINA DECIDES TO ACCEPT JASPER.

It was ebb tide, so far as the shifting course of public opinion went, with two personages who have in this narrative played a not unimportant part. The discovery of Richard Harrington's total innocence of the death by foul play of that Walter Travis of whose murder he had been accused had brought about a revulsion of feeling with reference to Miss Malstock and Jasper Holt. What they had done with reference to the late usurping master of Greystone was capable of being viewed from more than one standpoint, and in lights very various. Accordingly, by degrees, Mavina came to be degraded from her pedestal as a heroine, and to be looked upon as a sly and spiteful young lady, endowed with an unusual power of dissimulation, while the Mill Lane solicitor was regarded as little better than an impudent knave, wishful to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. The immediate results of this adverse judgment were lowered social consideration for Miss Malstock, and the loss of his more reputable clients by Mr. Holt, and the ultimate one that Jasper came to make a formal proposal for Mavina's hand.

"We are in the same boat, dear Miss Mavina," said the bold little lawyer, with a pardonable confusion of metaphors; "and may just as well put our horses together, if you have no objection. I always was your adorer, and we have gone through a good deal in the same cause, haven't we, and ought, I think, to make a match of it. I know the world, bless you! The very fools who hoot at us now will veer round and begin to applaud us again once we are married and settled. And with your wits to back mine, I should feel confident that I could extend my business and double my capital before three years are out."

Thus pressed, Mavina gave a reluctant consent to her suitor's proposal. She talked of being married in a year. Jasper suggested the briefer delay of three months. We

may leave them to decide this knotty point by mutual compromise.

The sudden and tragic death of the unfortunate tenant of Saxham Towers rendered necessary, for the second time within a brief space, the convening of a coroner's court. In this instance, too, a smooth verdict of accidental death was returned. Mrs. Stone's London agents undertook, in default of executors, for the Begum had died intestate, to provide for her obsequies, to pay her debts, to send back to their native country the servants whom she had brought with her from India, and to communicate with their correspondents in Bombay as to the safe keeping and ultimate disposal of the valuable property which she had left behind her in England, and of her considerable estate in India.

Then began a great and complicated lawsuit, carried on in Indian courts of justice, but with occasional appeals to English tribunals, between Zenobia's next of kin, a suit that for lavish expenditure, wholesale perjury, and ingenious arguments founded on texts from the Koran and clauses of the Laws of Menu, for spurious pedigrees, forged documents, and lying witnesses seems likely always to remain a by-word with those who have had the patience to unravel its details. In this litigation, and the costs which it involved, the great fortune, which by crooked means the late Mr. Stone amassed in his lifetime, had melted away like snow in sunshine. Perhaps it was a fitting end for ill-got wealth like his.

A sadder sequitur to the decease of Mrs. Stone was the self exile of the infatuated young man who had laid his heart at the feet of so unworthy an idol. Harry Redmayne never recovered the high spirits or the joyous good humor of other days. He was deaf to the arguments of his father or the pleading of his mother and sisters, who would fain have had him seek consolation elsewhere. He gave up his commission in the Guards. He left England a morose, careworn man, aged prematurely by unrequited passion and the bitterness of grief, and became a wanderer over the earth. America, South Africa, Australia—he tried them all by turns, his letters to those whom he had left in his old home growing shorter and more infrequent, until at last they ceased utterly, and, at the present time, it is not known whether the heir of Old Court is alive or dead. He

has been lost sight of, as was once Walter Travis, to whose memory a neat headstone, beneath which his mortal remains sleep in peace, has been put up in the churchyard of Greystone.

The letter of Mr. James Walsh, who had acted as second to Walter Travis in the unfair duel in the jungle, coupled with the facts elicited by Lord Norham's visit to India, and the entry in the diary of the late Lieutenant Graham, could not be passed over by the military authorities. The commander-in-chief, as a matter of course, directed a strict inquiry into the conduct of Sub-lieutenant Hollis, of the lancers, still quartered at Delhi, and who was plainly identical with the mysterious "H., who certainly did fire first," of whom Graham had spoken in his memoranda, and with the adversary to whom Travis had himself attributed his treacherously-inflicted wound.

There are such things as confidential reports by commanding officers, and in one of these registered at the Horse Guards, Mr. Hollis was written down as a black sheep, though not in colors quite so sable as he turned out to deserve. However, probably through some semi-official hint given in time to prevent close arrest and a court martial discreditable to the gallant regiment in which Mr. Hollis bore no very good character, the inculpatated subaltern abruptly "sent in" his papers, resumed his status as a civilian, and left India. He was last heard of, under the name of Briggs, on an obscure farm in the Middle Island of New Zealand.

Lord Norham, to the delight of the marquess, seemed, on his return from India, to be cured of the roving propensities that had so long afflicted his august father. He stayed at Hurst Royal, leaving it only for an occasional visit to London, or to the Isle of Wight, where his yacht, the *Moonbeam*, became familiar to nautical critics, spoke at hunt dinners and the meetings of the Agricultural Society, and in fact appeared to be taking to the duties of an English nobleman and landowner. The marquess has not yet been able to induce his heir either to take a wife or to enter Parliament, decisive steps by which he might be regarded as giving bail for home-staying habits in the future, but Lord Cheviot is hopeful both as to matrimony and St. Stephen's, on his son's behalf. Harold's sister is perhaps less sanguine that the adventurous spirit which had

led Lord Norham into so many all but untrodden regions is exercised at last ; but, after all, Lady Egeria Harrington is very glad to have her brother so near to her in her new home at Greystone Abbey.

The tale is told. Within six months of the day succeeding that on which the body of misguided Richard Harrington was laid to rest amid the ancestral dust of his race, she whom both brothers had loved so dearly gave her hand to the nobler of the two, to him to whose memory she had been faithful during the time when he was deemed to be dead.

Sir Lionel, who might merge his ancient baronetcy in the fine new title of Lord Harrington would he but go for a couple of sessions into Parliamentary harness and represent the county in which his possessions are so great, is popular with his friends, idolized by his tenantry, and happy in the love and confidence of his beautiful wife, who takes an interest in all his plans for benefiting his humbler neighbors, and is the pride and ornament of the old Abbey that has seen so many brides cross its threshold, but never one like her.

The Most Noble the Marquess of Cheviot gave his heartiest approbation to his daughter's marriage to the man of her choice, but never, to the present day and hour, has failed to find a source of perplexity in the fixed idea that he had personally attended the funeral of the son-in-law whom he saw nearly every day, and always cherishes an uncomfortable recollection of the stately interment of the unconscious impostor, poor Walter Travis, in the sumptuous mausoleum of the house of Harrington.

THE END.

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